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THE MAKING OF  
RURAL EUROPE



*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

A HISTORY OF LONDON

THE ROYAL PALACES OF  
SCOTLAND

MEDIÆVAL MARKETS AND  
FAIRS

# THE (MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

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LONDON : GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD.,  
RUSKIN HOUSE, 40 MUSEUM STREET, W.C. 1

*First published in 1923*

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*Printed in Great Britain by*

UNWIN BROTHERS, LIMITED, THE GRESHAM PRESS, LONDON AND WOKING

# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	7
I. THE MEDIÆVAL SYSTEM . . . . .	11
II. THE TENANT IN VILLEINAGE . . . . .	22
III. WHERE COLLECTIVISM PERSISTED . . . . .	33
IV. THE LATIFUNDIA . . . . .	49
V. THE SERVILE PEASANT . . . . .	65
VI. THE TENANT FARMER . . . . .	89
VII. THE SMALL OWNER . . . . .	107
VIII. WHAT HAPPENED IN ENGLAND . . . . .	123
IX. THE WAGE-EARNING LABOURER . . . . .	148
X. RURAL SYNDICALISM . . . . .	168
XI. AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATION . . . . .	185
XII. THE AGRARIAN REVOLUTIONS OF TO-DAY . . . . .	199
CONCLUSION . . . . .	217
INDEX . . . . .	220

TO  
THE MEN  
WHO HAVE HELD SCOTTISH LAND

## INTRODUCTION

THIS historical study is topical as well as historical. It does not so much merely supply a long-felt want as supply a want that ought long ago to have been felt. It is felt now with feverish haste and a fierce hunger, because it has been neglected. For enlightenment delayed too long takes on the terrors of revelation ; and in the matter of politics and the land there is always the chance of revolution as well. And there has been already a revolution, though partly a silent one, and one that has been aptly called the Green Rising. The Green is a peasant movement where the Red is a proletarian movement. The change is visibly passing over the whole of Europe, but it still remains something of a puzzle to most people in England. There is something fantastic about the very phrase Back to the Land, as if we were at present walking about on the clouds or the sea. Stevenson said that a man in Bedfordshire was conscious of the sea ; but it is the more modern fact that a man in Bedford is not conscious of Bedfordshire. Our urban populations have actually forgotten that we all live on the land. And in this there is no little national danger, for the great modern movement is agrarian and will go forward without them, inspired by the elemental ethics of the field. Against this there is no safeguard except the serious study, by educated England, of what agricultural citizenship has meant for men. There is no hope but in the candid reading of a clear and just historical narrative, such as that which Miss Douglas Irvine gives us here. It is in a true sense a more urgent matter to read it than to read

## 8 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

all the very latest extra-special editions of half a hundred newspapers.

The Green Rising is a thing like the Great War. It is a huge historical hinge and turning point, like the conversion of Constantine or the French Revolution. The poet says that peace has her victories as well as war. Nobody who has followed our own recent foreign policy will doubt that peace has her defeats as well as war. And what has happened in Europe since the war has been a vast victory for the peasants, and therefore a vast defeat both for the communists and the capitalists. This enormous fact has not been noted very much in the newspapers or in similar places, because as a practical fact men do reckon the world's history by its wars. The men who do it most are the pacifists who disapprove of all wars, and who can never for a single moment leave off thinking, talking and quarrelling about wars. The great revolution of which I speak has been by no means wholly pacific in the sense of the pacifist ; for it may be doubted whether any real revolution was a bloodless revolution. It is one of the difficulties of the pacifist position that it is very difficult to have a revolution that is not a war. But though there has been fighting on the fringes of the movement in Eastern and Central Europe, as there generally is in such cases, the main interest is not military, but merely economic and ethical. In a sort of awful silence the peasantries have fought one vast and voiceless pitched battle with Bolshevism and its twin brother, which is Big Business, and the peasantries have won. The first great State Socialist Government, the golden dream of our Socialist youth, has come on earth and reigned. It has destroyed the employing class and every other privileged enemy ; it has possessed itself of the whole machinery of legal and military authority. And it has broken down in broad daylight, before our very eyes, not (as reactionaries had reckoned) by any folly of idealism, but simply by not understanding the most permanent of human ideals. They were not defeated by capitalistic necessitarianism,

or by the military superiority of an aristocracy, either in foreign or native organisations and armies. They were victorious over all these reactionary foes; their experiment broke down, exactly as those of my way of thinking have always said it would break down, when it collided with the colossal institutions of the private property of the poor. If you cannot make Russian peasants Socialist you cannot make Russia Socialist. The Bolshevik Government has only survived by abandoning Bolshevism. It has fallen back on the basest and meanest of all possible revenges: that of threatening to invoke foreign capitalism to compete with and crush the labour of the little farmers. It has threatened to call in big capital against small capital. It has threatened to call in the worst of its enemies to destroy the best. In that final degradation dies away what was once the noble dream of Jaurès and Hyndman, because the philosophy of those great and good men left out the human sanctity of ownership, and the mastery of a man over material things.

But the movement that has been called for convenience the Green Rising is not confined to the business of Bolshevism, in the sense of Russian Bolshevism. The same change has been proceeding in every agricultural society and indeed in every society, except in those unhappy societies that have almost wholly ceased to be agricultural. All sorts of recent events have shown the way the tide is driving; the paying-off of mortgages in France and Belgium; the predominance of the agricultural plains in America; the rise of the Popular Party in Italy; the sudden concessions in Ireland. By every sign by which a patriot can know the peril of all he loves, we may know that England has again to do with agricultural as distinct from industrial necessities and ambitions; and that unless we can go with the land movement as we went with the sea movement, our ships may be left high and dry on an indifferent land. But the transition need not be so impracticable as it may at first appear. The one good thing about the new rich is that they are new, and



## 10 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

therefore have not been there long enough to do much mischief. In the same way industrialism and the urban type are really very recent though very ubiquitous ; and the old habits of the English life and language are both ancient and agricultural. We have not even had time to take the traditional figure of John Bull out of the coat and boots that Cobbett wore ; we have not had time to take from the most native regiments of the counties the ancient name of the Yeomanry. It is impossible to believe that a poison that began so recently can have permanently rotted a people that began so long ago ; and I for one shall hope that our own nation also may return with the other nations to the high road of humanity.

But for this purpose what is really necessary is the education of the English, and especially of those who in other ways may reasonably regard themselves as educated. It is the gaining of some consecutive conception of all the ancient and alternative policies about town and country. These things have been largely allowed to drop out of the culture of the big modern cities ; for the modern city is almost as remote from the historic city as from the historic countryside. What is needed is a larger outlook and a longer perspective of the whole story ; and in this respect alone what is needed everywhere is exactly what is provided here.

G. K. CHESTERTON.

# The Making of Rural Europe

## CHAPTER I

### THE MEDIÆVAL SYSTEM

LAND tenure must be acknowledged to be of first importance to the society of Europe. Its history is that of the evolution and development of four numerous and powerful classes—the peasants, the landlords, the employing farmers and the paid agricultural labourers. On these depend all agricultural production and therefore, indirectly, industry and the machinery of transport. Save in a few much industrialised countries these classes of society are still more important, both numerically and as producers of wealth, than any others. There are indeed greater criteria of importance than number and amount of production. Until very modern times the large majority of the population of Europe was made up of peasants, and yet peasants did not make European history. It was in towns that the web of history was woven although the threads might come from the country: Athens, Sparta, Rome, Carthage; and then again Rome with Paris, Florence, Genoa, Venice, Rouen, London, Madrid, Vienna. Even in remote countries, where towns were of the size and

## 12 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

wealth of villages, this rule held good, so that Scots history was made in Edinburgh. The arts and the ruling and ritual of life came from the towns. The plastic arts never, literature rarely, music and dancing with dramatic representation only in much conventionalised forms, manners and statecraft never, were rural products. Of man's higher forms of activity, only contemplation has flourished in the desert, and only architecture in the field and villages, where a plenitude of material, timber or stone, has caused building to be conditioned by utility without economy, so that we have the fine barns and farm and manor houses. But the more skilled craftsmen who worked on churches and monasteries and castles were townsmen or copied townsmen. On the whole civilisation is of urban manufacture.

This excuses the historian who relates the fortunes of towns as though they were so many oases in a negligible Sahara. And Rome was to blame in the first instance. What counted in the provinces of the Roman Empire was the municipalities, each taking form from Roman institutions, and the roads by which these towns were connected with Rome, which, in Sir Paul Vinogradoff's phrase, made the empire vertebrate. The towns and the roads survived the Barbarian invasions, and so did the pride of the towns and their contempt for the necessary countrymen. Even to-day, in the most Latin countries, Italy and France, where there are burgher families who go back some nine or ten generations, there is a tendency to look down upon countryfolk.

Northern and Central Europe were in another

position than Southern Europe in the Middle Ages. In the Northern and Central countries the capital might stand for the state, and other towns, which were the seats of bishoprics or monasteries, might be centres of religion and learning. But economically, because home craftsmanship was less advanced than in the Mediterranean lands and because access to Mediterranean traffic was indirect, the towns were market-towns, that is they were centres for the distribution of local country produce with a very small admixture of manufactured articles. When a second-rate Italian town like Perugia was making and distributing a giddy wealth of treasure, and Genoa was a mart for all the spoils of the Mediterranean, the citizens of York dealt chiefly in corn and wool, and even London's chief export was fleeces. So England, Scotland and Ireland, like Scandinavia, Germany, Austria and Hungary, and all the Slav countries, have had until modern times a more rural history than Italy, France and Spain. They were the poorer countries of Europe down to the sixteenth century when a new orientation was given to economic forces. A change then set in of which it was the later result that riches became a northern rather than a southern characteristic, and the coincidence that in this century the north turned Protestant, has given rise to a theory that Protestantism breeds citizens peculiarly adapted to wealth getting. The less romantic truth is that the discovery of the New World substituted the Atlantic for the Mediterranean as the sea of seas, so that Atlantic countries, first Spain, but then England, became the

## 14 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

chief maritime and trading states. A couple of hundred years later, with the exploitation of mechanical forces, came industrialism, and great wealth gravitated to the countries which had the coal and iron to supply mechanical motive power—England and later, and in a less degree, Belgium and parts of Germany and France. This new disposition of possessions, wrought by industrialism, is mirrored in the figures which show the population of towns. The towns in Napoleon's Europe and Jane Austen's England which had a population of more than one hundred and fifty thousand persons were, in the order of their size, London, Paris, Constantinople, Moscow, Vienna, St. Petersburg, Amsterdam, Lisbon, Berlin, Milan, Madrid, Dublin and Rome. The ten towns which came next to these in size, of which the population was between one hundred thousand and one hundred and fifty thousand, were all, with one exception, ports, and six of them Mediterranean ports. They were Barcelona, Venice, Palermo, Marseilles, Lyons, Copenhagen, Hamburg, Genoa, Valencia and Warsaw. One century later, in 1900, the twelve largest European towns, of which the least had a population of nearly eight hundred thousand, included none in Italy, Spain or Portugal, and four in England and Scotland. They were London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, St. Petersburg, Constantinople, Moscow, Manchester, Glasgow, Budapest, Hamburg and Liverpool.<sup>1</sup>

From these facts the varying position of the

<sup>1</sup> G. Sundbärg, *Aperçus statistiques internationaux* (Stockholm, 1908). Table 6.

countryman can be deduced. Always, all over Europe, he has borne the main burden, has been ultimately responsible for enabling activity; but in the Mediterranean countries he has had an inferior status—little or no directing power. Even the landholding aristocracy have tended in Italy to be townsmen first and landlords afterwards. In Northern, Central and Eastern Europe the landlords were everywhere the ruling class until the nineteenth century, and the actual tillers of the soil were of great recognised importance to the State. These landlords and the cultivators have now lost consideration and power exactly to the extent to which industrialism has gained a hold on their country. In England they are completely overshadowed by capitalists and industrial labourers; in Roumania they are, as they were five hundred years ago, the only significant element of the population.

The most striking difference between mediæval and modern society is due to a loss of integrity. In the Western Europe of the Middle Ages there was one centre, Rome; there was one Church, the Roman Church; one emperor who neither believed in his own right nor won the belief of others for it until he had been crowned in Rome; one official language, Latin; one type of statesman, the ecclesiastic trained in the Church's tradition; one type of scholar and artist, the monk; one ideal and tradition of chivalry pictured by the legendary heroes, Arthur and Charlemagne and their companions, and a few more. Of mediæval Europe one could predicate that this, or that country had more or less of certain qualities;

## 16 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

of eighteenth-century Europe one said rather that different countries had different qualities. And the same is true of social institutions. Until nationalities hardened in the fifteenth century you found the same institutions, differing, but not essentially, in Norway, Spain, Bavaria—in every European country. The culture of the lawyers was Latin and largely uniform, and hence all the work of lawyers, their codification of Barbarian as of Roman customs and law and their establishment of precedents, tended to a generalisation of types. The great influence of the Church, and the fact that all learning was disseminated by the Church acted in the same direction.

If we examine the most general conditions of land-holding in the Middle Ages, we find that the cultivated land of Europe is divided into a number of estates, each of which includes arable land and meadow, and that to each append certain tracts of pasture, woodland and waste, which have, in different countries, more or less indefinite boundaries. Each estate is in the tenure of a landlord whose obligations and dues are the lowest link in that chain of obligations and rights which is the Feudal System. Each immediate landlord of an estate farms a part thereof, either himself or through his reeve or seneschal. This is his demesne or home-farm on which his house is situated, or his reeve's house if, like many great men and most of the religious communities, he be a plural landlord. All the rest of his estate is farmed by his tenants.

This general description applies to nearly all Europe for the greater part of the last thousand years. But

there have been many particular variations, less because different countries have had different systems than because in different countries the same system has been, at any moment, at different stages of evolution. The tendency of advancing agricultural skill has been to increase the value of the soil and reduce the waste area, and an accompanying and dependent process has heightened the stringency with which the soil has been owned. But in Northern and Eastern Europe, and some mountainous regions elsewhere, the value of the soil long remained low for natural reasons, and these very districts were the last to be reached by the influence of the lawyers which always tended to define and tighten rights of property in land. When in most of Italy, men were holding clearly delimited pieces of land, the north and east of Europe were still at a stage of agriculture in which even the most powerful counted their wealth not by their acres, but by their beasts which pastured on the wastes, and by their rights over hunting men who brought them valuable booty. Such was for centuries the position of Scottish chieftains, so that when the Macdonald of Keppoch who fought for Claverhouse was asked what was his income he answered: "I can raise five hundred men." Such was the position of Ottar, a rich Norwegian of King Alfred's day, who held only a little cultivated land near the sea. It was not this which made him wealthy, but his flocks and herds, his twenty oxen and cows, twenty sheep and twenty pigs, and above all his six hundred reindeer, and the yearly tribute of hides, feathers, whalebone and ropes for his ships



## 18 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

which he received from the Finns who depended on him. A fixed share of the swamps and forests and mountains of his Norway was hardly an object of desire to Ottar. Beyond the stage of agriculture which he represents, there is another in which a lord's dependents have almost ceased to be hunters, and are already as much tillers of the soil as shepherds. They till, both for their own profit and for that of their lord, land which they hold of him, rendering him dues. But their tillage is elementary, extensive. They follow a primitive system of crop rotation: the land they sow in the autumn of one year is sown in the spring of the next year, and lies fallow in the third year; and the exigencies of this system cause the arable land of each estate to be divided into three fields. In each field a strip is annually allotted to every household for cultivation, and the whole community have rights of pasturage over the stubble. This so-called run-rig tillage is even now practised in remote districts, here and there in Europe. But it is falsely regarded as pure communism, since each household holds in severalty not only a dwelling, standing in a plot of land, but also live stock and chattels. And history shows that as the value of the arable strips increases there is a tendency towards their ownership by individual households. For it is over things which are very plentiful or are believed to be unprofitable that men are most communistic—the air, the water of the sea, wild flowers. Natural farming man, whether Slav, German, Celt or Latin, is loath annually to relinquish to the community strips of land on which he has worked harder than

his neighbours, which he may even have manured or drained. Therefore, as years pass, the distribution of strips takes place at longer intervals, not annually, but every three, ten or fifteen years : all these stages are found illustrated in Russia where new land has been repeatedly settled by communities. Finally, a community attains to the stage which had been reached in most of England and in parts of France and the Netherlands at the time of the Norman Conquest. The typical English manor then consisted of the lord's demesne, of the common on which lord and tenants alike pastured their beasts, and of the tenants' holdings in severalty, made up of each tenant's dwelling and its surrounding plot, of portions of meadowland, and of certain definite strips in the open arable fields. That this open-field system was little followed in Southern Europe, where each tenant's holding was generally inclosed, is due partly to the more intensive agriculture practised in the south at an early date, and partly to the fact that the most lucrative southern crops—vines, olives, chestnuts, willows, fruit-trees—could by no possibility be adapted to the three-field system. But common pasture-lands were the rule everywhere, and were extremely important owing to the large amount of live-stock in mediæval Europe.

The theories which account ethnologically for the different agricultural systems, which, in particular, label the traces of collectivism German, Slav or Celtic, and make individualism Latin, seem unnecessary, and fail to account for similarities which can have no basis of ancestral tradition—for instance,

## 20 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

for likenesses between Cossack villages and villages in the Hebrides. Parallel analogies could, for that matter, be found between yet more widely separated societies if Asia and Africa were not outside the scope of this book.

Above the immediate lord of the mediæval small cultivator there were other lords ; there was the chain of fealties and duties which connected him with the king, and the king—at least in theory—with the Emperor of the West. This was the Feudal System, with which, except in the lowest links of the chain, we here have little concern. But it is important to notice that it embodied two associated principles, those of right and duty. Because a man—king, landlord or peasant—enjoyed certain rights of property or authority he had certain obligations ; because a man discharged certain duties he was suffered to hold property or command fellow-men. The two principles are coincident ; to give priority or superiority to one is to wander in the fairyland of theory. A man who had not both rights and duties was not a citizen, and a man derived rights and duties primarily by his tenure of land. However he held it, whether as the overlord of a province who owed duty only to the king or as the tenant of a few acres, protected by custom from his overlord's encroachments, he had rights and obligations, whether or not his citizenship were legally technical—he had status. This is the position which emerged when the Barbarians had done their work of destruction in the Roman Empire, and society again assumed clear forms. Privilege, right, duty : all had a territorial basis. It is this position which

the Bolognese lawyers may be said to have embalmed when they got to work codifying Roman law and Barbarian law, Roman custom and Barbarian custom, and vestiges of all four. There actually seems to have been a moment, at least in the more backward countries, when the landless man was without a place in society, had neither obligations nor rights. There certainly was in these countries a time when his claim to a place could not be practically upheld. But in the more advanced, the more intensely Roman countries, he probably was always less forlorn because the ancient urban institutions had too much vitality to be overgrown entirely by landholding. Thus in Italy, early in the Middle Ages, other institutions, having a more personal basis than land tenure, were in active life. In Italy, then in France, then in England and more northern and eastern countries, we find landless men in full enjoyment of political rights because they are members of recognised associations. Membership of a corporation came everywhere to rank in the polity side by side with land tenure as a basis for citizenship, and the history began of the great mediæval gilds and corporate towns. In Italy they overshadowed the landlords. But in other countries, although they held their own against the landlords, it was at the price of much carefulness. Even within powerful corporations obedience was sometimes paid to the principle that a man had rights only if he held land, as when about 1300 in the chapter of St. Paul's a canon who was not seised of the landed estate called a prebend, could not take part in the secret business of the chapter or in elections.\*

\* *Registrum Sancti Pauli* (ed. W. Sparrow Simpson), p. 27.

## CHAPTER II

### THE TENANT IN VILLEINAGE

THIS study of the men who tilled the soil of Europe will begin at the beginning of recorded mediæval history in Italy, France, Spain, England. For there was then in these lands a type of cultivator, to which the cultivators in German, Slav, Magyar and Celtic countries conformed more and more closely as agriculture progressed, and which the lawyers helped to harden and generalise. Its description can be taken from a very Roman source, the province of Latium.<sup>1</sup> There, as elsewhere within the boundaries of the ancient Empire, the descent of the cultivators is traced from slaves, from free settlers or *coloni* and from leaseholders, but in the tenth century these classes had become assimilated to each other, and already the later practice of calling them all *coloni* had begun. The Domesday Book makes another distinction, that between villeins, cottars and slaves, all of whom became the villeins of the historical English manor. The *colono* of Latium and his fellows on the same estate were tenants of a landlord, all of whose cultivated land they held,

<sup>1</sup> See the excellent detailed study by C. Calisse, *Le condizioni della proprietà territoriale studiate sui documenti della provincia romana dei secoli, VIII., IX. e X.*, published in Vols. VII. and VIII. of *Archivio della Reale Società di Storia Patria*.

divided into their small lots, saving his demesne which he himself farmed immediately. The *coloni* were tied to the land, which meant first that they could not leave their holdings without being outlawed, unless by the lord's grace or because they bought his leave to go, and secondly that their landlord could not evict them. Right through the mediæval period the link that kept them on the soil secured rather than hampered them. The *coloni* were absolute owners of their chattels and of all or some of their live-stock. They cultivated their holdings for their own profit, save that they rendered a fixed share of the produce or a determined rent, nearly always in kind, to the lord. Their right to their holdings and their other possessions was hereditary. They worked on the lord's demesne for certain days in the week and performed certain specified works and services for him. He had rights of jurisdiction over them. From what we know of customs elsewhere we may conclude that they ground their corn in his mill, baked their bread in his oven, and pressed their grapes in his winepress, paying fixed fees for these conveniences. They could, at least at a later date, convey their holdings, as they could quit them, if they paid a fine to their lord. Such were for many centuries the salient conditions of the position of the typical small cultivator of Europe.

Mediæval society was built up on this class which supported it, and which formed its large majority—as late as 1300 two-thirds of the whole population of England are estimated to have been villeins.<sup>1</sup> And

<sup>1</sup> N. Hone, *The Manor* (ed. II.), p. 58.

## 24 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

the peasants made solid foundations. They had a singularly tenacious grip on the soil. Security of tenure, tradition, sense of property, localisation: all these forces gave them stability. Their strong family institutions, their common obligations to their lord and some communal rights of property and administration modified their individualism. The Church was there to hold them from sinking to bestiality. There was leakage to keep the flow of life healthy, for with the goodwill of their lords they provided many recruits to the clerical estate, and there were fugitives to the towns as well as the men who paid fines and emigrated openly to become craftsmen or traders. And there were the vagabonds, the most adventurous, most unfortunate and most unfit persons born into this society. The errant members of the villein class were numerous when a series of bad seasons or some devastating war made farming unprofitable. They might, with luck, join the retinue of a great nobleman, becoming one of a disorderly parasitic class unpopular with hard-working burghers and peasants,<sup>1</sup> and so they might do their share of fighting, in brawls, in a petty war or two, or in one of the great wars. They might enrol themselves in what a fifteenth-century chronicler calls the "mighty army of the begging poor," and receive alms astonishingly liberal in relation to the general standard of wealth, for the age was eminently charitable and the religious houses fed and lodged beggars, as a matter of routine. They might become

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, *The Political Songs of England* (Camden Soc.), p. 237.

professional outlaws, living by brigandage or, in the lands in which game was preserved, by illicit hunting. Or they might be jugglers, minstrels, mimes: here and there in the mediæval songs and fables there are touches which show that not all were composed by noble troubadours or stickit clerks of burgher rank, but some by men of villein origin who kept a sympathy for their class and a knowledge of it.

The villeins who stayed at home occupied many grades of prosperity, culminating in the snug holder of a profitable small farm who pastured several cows on the common. Some such farmers could save and grow rich, for thirteenth-century French *fabliaux*,<sup>1</sup> recount misalliances between enriched villeins and the daughters of poor knights, and French customary law made special provision for the gentle lady who took a villein to husband.<sup>2</sup> In the village community the humblest position was that of the tenant of two or three acres, known in England as a cottar. The allowance of food and drink, to which a villein had right on the days in the week—his boondays—on which he worked for his lord, must have been important to the cottar. Probably he laboured for hire on other days in the week in the busy seasons, either for his lord or for another richer neighbour. But the lowliest cottar had, as well as allowances and any wages, a secure and permanent right to

<sup>1</sup> For collections of the *fabliaux* and extracts from them, see C. M. J. Bédier, *Les Fabliaux*, and Ch. V. Langlois, "La société du moyen âge d'après les fableux," in *Revue Bleue*, August 15 and September 5, 1891.

<sup>2</sup> *Etablissements de St. Louis*, ed. Paul Viollet.



his cottage and some land, and he had his live-stock. It may be concluded that all villeins kept poultry, for a rent of eggs and a hen is an incident of the meanest tenures. Almost as invariably they must have owned pigs : every village had its herd of swine which roamed the woods, then very extensive throughout Europe, and fed on mast. The swineherd was the most inevitable of communal officials, and won himself a place in song and fable as the humblest of a humble class. In the south of Europe donkeys were probably at least as common as they are now. Boccaccio tells of peasants who offered corn and grain to St. Anthony, praying him to guard their oxen and asses, their cows and their sheep. The poor cottar in Italy may have had a donkey, but it is probable that he nowhere owned either cows or oxen—he neither possessed nor needed a plough to which to yoke his oxen for he and his family could dig his arable plot. It is likely, however, that he kept not only poultry and a pig or pigs, but also a goat and a sheep or two pastured on the common, to give him milk and cheese and wool, and he certainly had household goods. Even Patient Griselda, whom exigencies of drama compelled Boccaccio to endow with a very humble origin, brought a dowry to her noble and trying husband, and had a father who owned sheep and who could shelter her in his cottage when she was repudiated. A thirteenth-century French *fabliau* tells of a villein youth who obtained leave to bring a wife to live with him in the house of an elder relative. The bride's mother discussed the dowry with her husband.

We will give her a calf,  
And a pickle of land ;  
I can spare from my plenishing  
Some napery and linen.

The wedding presents included a sucking pig, two hens, a little money, wine and a loaf of bread. This establishment was meant to represent a ridiculous extreme of poverty. It was scornfully discussed by the gossips as not worth eightpence ; it presently had to call in the usurer and it ended disastrously. Other *fabliaux* describe villeins in possession of quite a number of household goods ; and both pictures and *fabliaux* show them coarsely but warmly clad in homespun and shod in cowhide. Piers Plowman, in his complaint of the King's purveyor, betrays that in the fourteenth century an English tenant in villeinage had a good deal to lose.

Both my geese and my pigs his people fetch ;  
I dare not for dread of him fight nor chide.  
He borrowed my horse Bayard and brought him never again,  
Nor no farthing for him, for aught that I can plead.  
He maintaineth his men to murder mine,  
Forestalleth my sales at fairs, fighteth me in my chafferings,  
Breaketh my barn-door and beareth away my wheat,  
And giveth me but a tally for ten quarters of oats.<sup>1</sup>

Except in times of scarcity these peasants must have eaten their fill. For it is where there is so-called scientific farming that the tillers of the soil are stinted. Primitive agriculture is almost necessarily for the direct benefit of the cultivators and is lavish of by-products. And the mediæval peasant lacked an

<sup>1</sup> *Piers Plowman*, A. Passus, IV. pp. 33-44.

incentive which urges even the unscientific modern smallholder to sell his produce, for he had little need of money. His rent, his tithes and his alms were nearly always paid in kind. He had to give occasional fees to the village craftsmen who served him—the wright, the smith, the carpenter—but otherwise he could often have done without the price he received for his superfluous produce when he carried it to the nearest market. His staple diet consisted of milk, cheese, eggs, beans and other vegetables, rye-bread or oatcake or some other mixture of meal and water, bacon or pork, an occasional fowl. He drank ale or cider or wine, according to his country. Fish was plentiful within reach of the coast, and elsewhere salt fish was probably sold at every market. But fresh-water fish was preserved by the landlord in Western Europe.

The villein was protected against illegal exactions by a rigid custom. Yet he sometimes complained of oppression, either of an oppressive interpretation or of a violation of custom. In England he had another grievance in the exactions of the Exchequer for he paid taxes directly. His complaints have passed into literature only rarely. But there is an English song, made under Edward I, of which part can be rendered as follows :

I heard the men who till the soil making much moan,  
How they have suffered in their tillage ;  
Good years and corn, both are gone ;  
Men tell no tales and no songs sing—  
Now we must work ; nought else can we do ;  
No longer can I live by my gleaning ;  
And ever more bitterly they ask for the boondays,  
And ever, the fourth penny goes to the king.

Later the singer tells of the strictness of manorial officials.

The hayward wrongs us,  
The bailiff works ill to us and thinks he does well,  
The woodward brings us woe if we search beneath the branches,  
No riches and no rest can we gain or keep.<sup>1</sup>

Drought and floods, unseasonable frosts and rain, a murrain among the cattle were all hard for small primitive farmers to bear. When times were bad they got into arrears with their rent to their lord and they borrowed money on security, often from the usurer who already had his place in society. Presently their goods became liable to distraint. It was a very wise provision of Magna Carta that no villein's farming implements might be taken for his debts, and there were parallel French provisions, an ordinance of Guy, Count of Never and Forez, which in 1235 forbade that a cultivator's person or animals should be seized or that he should be deprived of his tools,<sup>2</sup> and a slightly later ruling by Philip the Fair, that no man might take from a peasant his *beste de charrue*, his ploughing animal. In the fourteenth century Charles V forbade the imprisonment of ploughmen for debt and protected from distraint their houses, oxen and other animals and their ploughs.<sup>3</sup> The need for this legislation shows that there were villeins whose creditors seized their tools and ploughs and beasts, the essential part of their stock-in-trade,

<sup>1</sup> *Political Songs of England* (Camden Soc.), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Henri Sée, *Les Classes rurales et le régime domanial en France au moyen âge*, pp. 589-90.

<sup>3</sup> Albert Babeau, *La vie rurale dans l'ancienne France*, p. 302.

and even their persons. A ruined villein had to leave his cot and his holding, for which he could no longer render dues, and become a landless man, join the vagabond company. On the whole, the evidence shows that while in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries these peasants had, in Western Europe, a relatively high standard of civilisation, the precariousness of mediæval life often interrupted their maintenance of it. These small farmers without banking accounts had little to defend them against the calamities which alone are called "visitations" by old-fashioned writers—exceptional weather, war, fire and disease. Epidemics, often the aftermath of war or of the famines caused by war or the weather, brought them great suffering.

But probably the worst disaster which could overtake a peasant was war, for the age was one of generals, obliged to economise small armies, who wasted an enemy's country rather than engaged in pitched battles. William the Conqueror, who was more skilful than most of his peers but no innovator, must by himself have brought countless peasant families to the extremity of wretchedness. When he was a very young man he suffered two French armies to ravage his Duchy of Normandy, because he would not risk a battle in which he was not certain of success. Before the battle of Senlac, while Harold was in the north, he marched about Sussex, laying the land waste. After Senlac he methodically wasted all the country around London until the city surrendered in despair. When, a few years later, the English beyond the Humber rose against him, he

harried the northern counties so ruthlessly that they are said to have been impoverished for centuries. These were normal methods, those employed in the unceasing petty wars of Italy, in the long French wars. War seems to have been the primary cause of that curious desperate rising of French peasants in the fourteenth century which is called the Jacquerie.

Boccaccio's tales and much mediæval French literature reflect the disregard and derision in which the chivalrous and burgher classes were wont to hold the peasant. But here and there the villein who resented this contempt for his estate is betrayed in a songmaker. Thus one excellent French *fabliau* of the thirteenth century relates that a villein, who is refused entrance to Paradise by *le bel sire*, St. Peter, and by St. Paul and St. Thomas, demands and obtains audience of God.

When my body dwelt on earth,  
I led an ordered and clean life ;  
To the poor I gave of my bread,  
At my fire I warmed them,  
Nor did I suffer them to go  
Lacking coat or shirt ;  
And I confessed my sins truly,  
And received Thy Body worthily ;  
Who thus dies, we are taught  
That God pardons his sins.  
Thou wilt not lie for me.

Perhaps rusticity was, even by the half French literary and courtly class, less despised in England than in Italy and France, for Chaucer respects it as much as urbanity. In the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* all the chief personages of English rural

society in the fourteenth century are pictured—the knight, his son the squire, the franklin or freeholder, the miller, the reeve, the good parson, and the ploughman who was the parson's brother. This ploughman, who so punctually paid tithes both of his swinke or ploughland and of his cattle, was no other than a tenant in villeinage, a kind, religious, prosperous man, not inferior in civility and intelligence to his companion pilgrims.

With him ther was a Plowman, was his brother,  
 That hadde y-lad of dong ful many a fother,  
 A trewe swinker and a good was he,  
 Livinge in pees and parfit charitee.  
 God loved he best with al his hole herte  
 At all tymes, thogh him gamed or smerte,  
 And thanne his neighebour right as him-selve.  
 He wolde thresshe, and ther-to dyke and delve,  
 For Cristes sake, for evere povre wight  
 Withouten hyre, if it lay in his might.  
 His tythes payed he ful faire and wel,  
 Bothe of his propre swink and his catel.  
 In a tabard he rood upon a mere.

## CHAPTER III

### WHERE COLLECTIVISM PERSISTED

MEDIÆVAL society had universally a collectivist element in that its unit was not the individual but the family. This was truer of rural than of urban society, because towns provided much scope for individual achievement, and it was truer of the popular than of the chivalrous class because the Feudal System emphasised the importance of the head of a gentle family, at the expense of his kin, by fastening responsibility for feudal allegiance and chivalrous duties on him. Tenure in villeinage was, on the other hand, plainly by a household. The Venerable Bede even uses the word "family" as a measure of land, meaning evidently the area which customarily supported a cultivating family. Thus he describes Iona as "not large, but of the size of five families according to the measure of the English."<sup>1</sup> It was "with all his family except the housewife" that a Durham villein had to give boondays.<sup>2</sup> The very exception of the housewife proves that the household was contemplated in its integrity—the family for whom it was a necessity that someone should cook and clean and care for young and infirm members

<sup>1</sup> *Eccles. Hist. Angl.*, I. ch. 25; II. ch. 9; III. ch. 4, 13, 16.

<sup>2</sup> See *Boldon Buke* (Surtees Soc.), *passim*.



and domestic animals. "The children shall live with their father and feed from his pot," ran an ordinance made by the Count of Champagne in 1188.<sup>1</sup> The customs regulating succession show the same view. The institution of heredity is, of course, itself the outcome of family solidarity. In mediæval Europe the representation of each gentle family by its leading male member led to primogeniture in the chivalrous class. But primogeniture did not obtain among tenants in villeinage. Even in countries where the eldest son of a villein was, for purposes of record and legal convenience, the technical successor to his father's holding, he did not really succeed to individual tenancy of the property which had been held in his father's name. It would be far truer to say that he succeeded to a narrow chieftainship. The customary law of several French provinces specified that all the children of a tenant in villeinage, sons and daughters alike, had a right to their part of the inheritance. Even the prodigal was not always excepted. If a villein had several sons, said the customs of Champagne, of whom one was a frequenter of taverns and a player of dice and forsook his home, when this son returned after his father's death he was as much entitled to a share of the inheritance as his most industrious and home-staying brothers. The same customs specify that there must be family consultations to decide on dowries.<sup>2</sup> And the glimpses of rural life given by

<sup>1</sup> Henri Doniol, *Serfs et vilains au moyen âge*, p. 116.

<sup>2</sup> *Etablissements de St. Louis*, ed. P. Viollet, II. p. 277; III. pp. 84, 161.

the *fabliaux* always show that the family was the basis of society.

It might well happen—it generally did happen when the holding was considerable—that the death of a chief did not cause a break-up. A young and adventurous man might then receive what he was willing to accept as his portion and take himself off, but there is evidence that many households of cultivators included several married couples and their children, and also the bachelors and spinsters who were the least costly part of the labour supply. Such a composite household is indicated by the *fabliau*, cited in the last chapter, of the young villein who obtained leave to bring his bride to live in the house of his elder kinsman. The restrictions placed on the marriage of the young men and women by the heads of their families or by the landlords were due to the necessity of regulating the supply of labour. And as in some districts of France the conception of joint tenure by a family operated to give every child of a tenant, even him who had forsaken his home, a share in the succession to the holding, so in others it had the contrary effect and excluded from inheritance the sons who had been absent from the homestead for more than a year and a day, thus abandoning the family community.<sup>1</sup>

This ~~family solidarity~~ persisted in peasant societies when it died out in towns and in industrialised countries. In 1664, in certain villages of the Limousin,

<sup>1</sup> Guy de Coquille, *Institution au droit des François* (ed. 1630), pp. 186-7.

"families of more than one hundred persons of the same blood were living in common, as in a college."<sup>1</sup> Right down to the Revolution the population of French villages was computed not by individuals, but by "hearths." When a partition of the commons was authorised in Burgundy, Artois and the Three Bishoprics, in the eighteenth century, it was to the heads of families that a distribution was allowed.<sup>2</sup> In Denmark in the middle of last century from four to six related families could be found living together.<sup>3</sup> The Commissioners of 1884 complained of the Highland crofters that "the offspring of the recognised occupiers of township holdings remain and multiply on the ground, either sharing the narrow dwelling of the head of the family or putting up habitations in defiance of State regulations."<sup>4</sup> When modern legislators ended the old system of land tenure, as they did in the nineteenth century in several countries, it was not for an impractical reason that they enacted that a peasant's sons should share his holding in equal parts. They did it because only thus could they satisfy the peasant's demand for what seemed to him just: every one of a peasant's sons felt that he had a part in the family holding, and that, if he left the family roof, he must hold this part in severalty. About 1884, an Italian Government Commission found the peasantry organised in patriarchal house-

<sup>1</sup> Albert Babeau, *La vie rurale dans l'ancienne France*, p. 227.

<sup>2</sup> Emile de Laveleye, *De la propriété et de ses formes primitives*, p. 254.

<sup>3</sup> Georg Ludwig von Mauren, *Einleitung zur Geschichte der Markhof, Dorf und Stadtverfassung*, p. 205.

<sup>4</sup> *Report on Highland Crofters*, 1884, p. 433. Cf. *Statistical Account of Scotland*, 1845, VII. 153.

holds in Piedmont, Lombardy, Venetia, Tuscany and Liguria, and also in South Italy—in Campania and Calabria—wherever smallholdings were numerous and poverty was not extreme.<sup>1</sup> A vivid picture of this economy, the dominant one over great areas of Europe for many centuries until yesterday or to-day, is given by a modern Italian pamphleteer : <sup>2</sup>

I remember, when I was a boy half a century ago, I used, in the autumn holidays, to make excursions in the neighbourhood of Padua where I was acquainted with some families of authentic peasants. . . . The families were not small units, composed of a husband, a wife and a child or two, but great patriarchal groups, aggregations of several families, connected by ties of blood, who collectively worked a farm of which they were tenants. Usually it was let to the whole race of them, and they obeyed the orders of their chief, who was the oldest man among them, the father, grandfather, great-grandfather of the various generations represented in the community. What nestfuls of children ! Hardly did I appear in the yard before they emerged from all sides, running to meet me in their tens because they knew I could teach them new games and scatter some halfpence among them. There was only one kitchen, and the girls and the Titianesque brides were responsible in turns for the cooking. . . .

. . . I remember that in the cellar there was everybody's wine-barrel, a large barrel, and also a big cask which held the small wine ; but each family had further its little closed store-cupboard where there were a bottle of good wine, a piece of bacon and sausages. In the bedroom of each family there was, moreover, a little cote where dwelt a pair of pigeons which flew in and out freely through a hole in the

<sup>1</sup> *Inchiesta Agraria*, 1881-6, II. 304, 322, 338, 361, 379, 396, 409, 422, 444, 459, 470, 505, 528, 556, 585, 604, 624, 639, 653, 668, 751 ; III. 521 ; IV. 38 ; V. (i) 633 ; V. (ii) 73, 201, 312 ; VI. 89, 140 ; VII. 200, 409 ; VIII. 323 ; IX. ; X. 584.

<sup>2</sup> Signor Antonio Bezzozero. Cf. S. Jacini, *La proprietà fondiaria e le popolazioni agricole in Lombardia*, ed. II, Milan and Verona, 1856, p. 81.

## 88 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

door ;<sup>1</sup> and each family had its own share of the nuts, eggs, wool and so forth. When a young man was going to be married a great wedding procession accompanied the bridal pair to the church and brought them home again ; and then under the porch there was a feast that had meant busy cooking. . . .

In the winter the women sat weaving, holding a big loom which required arm and leg gymnastics before the shuttle would turn and the combs rise and fall. They made for sheets and shirts white, very strong linen which was bleached in the sun, and also linen striped in colours for men's and women's clothes. The men busied themselves making harness, small and large baskets and what not. And from time to time the tailor or shoemaker arrived, set up his shop for a week, two weeks, even a month, and clothed or shod the whole tribe.

There is a similar description, dating from the 'eighties, of German and Slovak family communities in Slovakia :<sup>2</sup>

The houses are ranged on both sides of a road some four or five kilometres long. The cultivated lands belonging to each dwelling stretch behind it in an unending strip. The houses of the family communities are distinguished by their vast proportions. Some of them can hold as many as seventy persons. Usually they are two-storied. On the ground floor are the kitchen and a large room in which the old men, the lads and the children sleep. Each married couple has its own room on the first storey. All the chattels and real estate form an indivisible collective property, transmitted undivided from generation to generation. The head of the family, the *Wirth*, generally the eldest man, regulates each

<sup>1</sup> In many countries however, only gentle persons were, until modern times, allowed to keep pigeons, which helped themselves to the tenants' crops. In France and the Scottish Lowlands this was a grievance. See for the limitation of the right Guy de Coquille, *Institution au droit des François* (ed. 1630), "Colombier à pieds et en fonds de terre ne peut estre édifié de nouvel en justice d'autrui."

<sup>2</sup> Emile de Laveleye, *Les Communautés de famille et de village*.

person's work, but consults the grown members of the community when important decisions are to be taken. He keeps the money, and accounts, once a month as a rule, for receipts and expenditure. Everyone puts his earnings, even his earnings outside the family land, into a common till. But everyone also has his private purse: sometimes he distils a certain quantity of grain, sometimes he fattens a calf or pig. The *Wirth's* wife is housekeeper. Meals are taken in common, all helping themselves from one great dish in the centre of the table, unless there is meat, when the *Wirth* cuts it up and gives each one his share. . . . When a member of the household breaks its order or will not obey the *Wirth*, he is expelled with a gift of two florins to help him to find work elsewhere. When a girl marries she is given a cow, a bed with its bedding and a chest.

Compare with these accounts the observations of a journalist who visited Poland in the autumn of 1921:

The Polish peasants have large families and the land is worked by the members of the family. The patriarchal system still prevails, and married sons and daughters bring their wives and husbands home as a matter of course. . . . A certain sum is set by for the purchase of stock and agricultural tools, and the balance is divided equally amongst the family, the heads of the household receiving a larger proportion than the rest. In the winter evenings the women weave the beautifully coloured stuffs in which they dress, and the men practise woodcarving or the making of pottery.<sup>1</sup>

This family system has even left traces where the peasants have been debased to the position of wage-earners. In the Province of Ferrara in the 'eighties even day-labourers were found living in common households controlled by the eldest male member and his wife.<sup>2</sup> In Berwickshire and Roxburghshire

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Cecil Chesterton in *The New Witness*, November 11, 1921.

<sup>2</sup> *Inchiesta Agraria*, 1881-6, II. 505.

## 40 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

a farmer hires not individual ploughmen but families : a ploughman's or a cottar-woman's daughters are bound to work by the terms of their parent's engagement ; the wages of the family are paid in a lump sum to the father or mother. In Hungary a provision of the law of 1897, which forbids an agricultural employer to engage a whole family by a single contract, is clearly aimed at removing the vestiges of the old system. In North Germany a labourer who has a dwelling on a farm often has to supply, as well as his own labour, that of a lad or girl, known as a *Scharwerker*, who may or may not be his child but whom he lodges and boards and whose wages he receives with his own.

In view, then, of this widespread and strong tendency of peasant society to organise itself on the basis of the family, the fact that family institutions reached a very advanced development in some countries, where the tendency was not met by counter-influences, is not surprising. In South-Slavia and Bulgaria the Turkish conquerors superseded the native landlords except that apostate minority who were suffered, because they became Mahometan, to retain their fiefs. But the feudal lords, Slav and Turk, did not modify the social system of the cultivators. When the Turk had been driven south this Slav peasantry was found to be organised in composite families, called *zadrugas*, each of whom held land and cultivated it collectively. The membership of a *zadruga* varied and was more numerous on the fertile plains than in mountain fastnesses. In Croatia from six to eight men generally

belonged to a *zadruga*, in Slavonia about sixty, in Upper Herzegovina as many as seventy. The chief was elected and was usually the fittest male member of the elder generation. He administered the land and the family with the help of a council composed of all the grown men of the household, and he could dispose of the common property only jointly with this council, who could supersede him if he proved unworthy or became infirm. Although the household was technically held together by kinship, it could acquire new blood not only by the marriages of its women but also by adoption.

A description made in the 'eighties of a Bulgarian *zadruga* shows a farm-steading which included "numerous barns for grain, pens for live-stock and small stables," as well as four dwelling houses. The houses in which the married couples lived apart were clustered about a two-storied house common to the whole family. This latter house consisted of a ground-floor built over a cellar in which wine, oil and meat were stored, and of a two-roomed upper storey reached by a staircase abutting on a verandah. The two upper rooms were separated by a fireplace from which both were warmed; one was used for meetings and feasts, and strangers were lodged in the other.<sup>1</sup> Probably, as in Slovakia, the young men and children slept on the ground floor.

No one of these Southern Slav family communities ever made a village: every village contained several of them.<sup>2</sup> Geography and Turkish dominion had

<sup>1</sup> Emile de Laveleye, *La Peninsule des Balkans*, II. 119.

<sup>2</sup> For accounts of the *zadrugas*, see *Law Magazine and Law*



kept them remote from Western legal influences, and their tenure had therefore not been converted into a technical right in severalty. In Old Serbia and Old Bulgaria they were, when the Turk was driven out early in the last century, left without overlords and the absolute owners of their land, and they then attracted the attention of students. But they seem not to have differed importantly from cultivating families in other parts of Europe, to have reached only a slightly more advanced stage of collectivism. They have been killed by the modern lawyers. The Serbian Civil Code of 1844, which was based on the Austrian Code of 1811, approximated them to the institution of partnership as it was known to Western Europe, and afterwards any member of a *zadruga* had the right to alienate or mortgage his share of the collective property, or might require that it should be delivered to him in several ownership.

Sir Henry Maine believed that the collective unit which is wider than a household, the historical and the existing village community, represented an expansion of the composite family, and many Russian families are indeed said to have split up and formed villages in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> As Abram said, "Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me" to Lot, his brother's son, when "the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together," so European families divided,

*Review*, February 1878; V. Bogisic, *De la forme dite Inokosna de la famille rurale chez les Serbes et les Croates*; and Emile de Laveleye, *La Peninsule des Balkans*, II. 34, 119, 353.

<sup>1</sup> Maxime Kovalevsky—*Tableau des origines et de l'évolution de la famille et de la propriété*, Stockholm, 1890, p. 168.

constituting several households. So households have split up, down to modern times, when they have reached the size—different in different conditions—which has made communal life impractical.

But a certain communal bond, connecting the households of a village or an area larger than a village, subsisted throughout Europe at least until the end of the Middle Ages. And in some countries or districts village communities continued until a far later date to practise a cultivation which was almost purely collective, generally a joint management of meadows and pastureland and run-rig tillage of the arable fields. Monsieur de Laveleye has found examples of such survivals in Portugal, Spain, Italy, among the Basques of France and in Germany, nearly always in unfertile mountain villages where arable farming is little profitable.<sup>1</sup> In the Highlands of Scotland communal cultivation by villages subsisted until the middle of the eighteenth century.

In the Scottish Highlands arable land, for obvious natural reasons, has never been of great value and therefore the soil long escaped stringency of ownership. The people were divided into clans, each in theory held together by the tie of kinship, and each occupying an ill-defined tract and giving allegiance to a chieftain. The clansmen were fighting-men, hunters, herdsman; for long they were hardly tillers of the soil. It was part of their pride that their backs were not bent by labour, like those of the Lowland husbandmen, but that they bore themselves upright

<sup>1</sup> See his *La propriété collective du sol en différents pays*.

#### 44 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

like gentlemen. In the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries however, the land occupied by each clan had come to be divided into townships on each of which a village community was settled. About the cabins of the peasantry lay the arable land which they shared out among themselves by lot, year by year. It was usually divided into the infield, on which the collected manure was laid, and the outfield, made up of level plots in the valley-bottoms, on which the cattle were folded and which were alternately under crops and in lea. Uncultivable patches among the fields were used as meadows and gave a scanty supply of hay. Each tenant might pasture on the commons a number of cows and sheep which was usually proportionate to his arable share. Sometimes the landlord let the township directly to the body of the tenants, sometimes to the lessee called a tacksman who sublet it to them. In either case they paid rent in money and kind, and in services discharged on the home-farm. The stock was nearly always the property of the landlord or the tacksman, and let with the land. There were exceptions to the prevailing system when the tacksman did not let the township, but farmed it all himself, keeping on it a number of cottars, who worked on the land and to each of whom he allotted a cottage, grass for a cow or two, and ground on which to sow about a boll of oats.<sup>1</sup> Such were the land tenure and the farming, gradually, but almost totally superseded by crofting after the 'Forty-five. It would seem that a stage

<sup>1</sup> See *Report of H.M. Commissioners on Highland Crofters*, 1884, and Skene, *Celtic Scotland*, III. ch. x.

of agriculture is represented through which sunnier, less accidented countries must have passed at a remote date, when their newly settled soil was still of little value and its ownership in severalty by separate households was yet to come.

The highly developed Russian village community was,<sup>1</sup> on the other hand, made up of organised household communities which were almost exactly like the Southern Slav *zadrugas* and were especially important in the old Muscovite empire. It was the family chiefs who constituted the council—the *mir*—which directed the larger community, that of the village. The collectivism of the village appeared in its communal tenure of the indivisible waste and forest, and in its communal management of the meadowlands and of the three arable fields which were held in strips by the households in severalty and in perpetuity. Moreover, no new tenant of lands of the village was admitted except by the council, and holdings of arable and meadowland, which fell vacant were shared by the members of the community: in these two particulars the villages had rights which in mediæval Western Europe fell to the landlord. The arable and meadowland holdings of the several households were of various size and value, and their tenants paid taxes in proportion to them and discharged services on the lord's demesne.

This was the position until the sixteenth century. The landlord's right was more limited than in Western

<sup>1</sup> This account is taken mainly from Maxime Kovalevsky, *Modern Customs and Ancient Laws of Russia*, London, 1891.

Europe; the communal rights were larger and the tenant was entirely free to quit his holding at his own pleasure. In the sixteenth century there was a definition and a strengthening of the landlord's right, and in 1592 the peasant was tied to the soil: as in West Europe in the Middle Ages he was debarred from leaving the estate on which he held land and worked. The new position was partly due to the new strength of the aristocratic element in Russian society, and partly to the increased population which had put bounds to the easily settled waste of the country. A second measure which gravely affected the peasants was the introduction, in 1719, by Peter the Great, of a poll tax, to replace the tax they had previously paid on their farms in accordance with the area of these. Peasant households with very small and others with comparatively large holdings thus found themselves taxed equally, and none had the possibility of escape by emigration. Partly because of an extraordinary persistence of communal solidarity, but partly, also, in obedience to the dictation of superior authority, a new distribution of arable strips ensued. It became customary in most Russian villages for the *mir* to redistribute the arable land as often as the Government revised taxes, namely every nineteenth year, but sometimes the redistribution occurred more frequently, every sixth or seventh year. In 1861 there was yet another great event, the emancipation of the serfs and the assignment to them of the ownership of their holdings. The village communities were left, without overlords, supreme under the Tsar. In the new conditions the tendency

to the individual property of households revived. It became the rule that a village council might, by a two-thirds' majority, introduce ownership of the village lands in severalty, and many villages have exercised this right.

This account is true of the Russia which has been longest settled, but in newer Russia—for instance, in Siberia and the territory of Don Cossacks—there were, until modern times, communities who had reached a less advanced stage of agriculture, who, when a field was exhausted, transferred their labour to virgin soil, or who practised run-rig tillage.<sup>1</sup>

There were three elements in early rural society capable of assuming direction—the village community, the landlord and the cultivating household. In Europe as a whole, the village community was persistently powerful in its management of uncultivated pasturelands, in its common employment of shepherds, cowherds and swineherds, its common use and upkeep of roads, waterways, ovens, mills, winepresses, breweries, wash-houses, and in common policing, and it was notably strengthened by the parochial organisation. The instances of its survival as a community of collective cultivators are exceptional, and seem to have been due either, as in the Highlands, to unproductive agriculture which kept back the peasant households, or, as in Russia, to extensive agriculture, combined with a late development of feudalism which kept back the land-

<sup>1</sup> See Maxime Kovalevsky, *Modern Customs and Ancient Laws of Russia*, London, 1891; *Tableau des origines et de l'évolution de la famille et de la propriété*, Stockholm, 1890.

lord. But sometimes, in other conditions, the communal element prevailed over landlordism and over the rights of individual households and the land of a territorial unit was, in modern times, corporately owned and administered. The striking examples of this development are that of the boroughs, who own or owned land all over Europe, and that of the other communal estates which exist or existed in most of Europe, and are called *Allmende* in Switzerland, South Germany and Scandinavia. The bodies who hold these lands are distinguished from village communities because their members do not themselves cultivate their property, either necessarily or generally.

Often landlordism became the prevailing element. Even in the Middle Ages the landlord of Western Europe had the position of owner of common lands, and of such common conveniences as the mill, the oven, and the winepress. The tenants were regarded only as usufructuaries of the wood and the waste and paid him fees for their compulsory use of his mill or bakehouse. And in some countries and districts he was later able so to strengthen himself to their detriment that he absorbed most of the profits of cultivation and they were either squeezed out of existence or debased towards slavery.

In yet other countries and districts history shows the cultivating households strengthening their position at the expense of village collectivism and landlordism, and there came to be both small tenants who enjoyed much independence and peasant owners,

## CHAPTER IV

### THE LATIFUNDIA

THE Latin word, modified to "latifonds," "latifundi," "latifundos," is given in France, Italy and Spain to large properties managed as simple units. The agricultural history of the continent of Europe has caused this word to be applied nearly always to an extensively farmed property, and it will have that sense in this book.

The latifundia of the Roman Empire did not persist in the Middle Ages to any important extent. The mediæval and modern latifundia represent not a survival, but one of the forms of the decadence of estates of the type which has been described, estates made up of the small holdings of tenants, the landlord's demesne, and the commons in which the rights of tenant and landlord mingled. When such an estate, or a large part of it, became a latifundium, the extremity of the landlord's victory over the tenant community and the tenant households had been reached. The tenants had not merely been oppressed; they had been suppressed. As tenants they no longer existed although some of them might survive as paid labourers. Every right of property and direction had been concentrated in the landlord.



In feudal theory a landlord was not owner of his land but holder thereof on certain conditions: he owed duties to his overlord in return for his rights, and duties to his tenants in return for their rents and services. The theory was modified by another, that might is right, and it may rarely have been formulated. But it was implicit in the system of land tenure, and was acted on in practice at every turn. When, however, the landlord became much more powerful than his tenants he tended to degenerate into a landowner. And when once he regarded himself and was regarded as full owner, saving that he still had an acknowledged obligation to pay taxes, his sole function beyond taxpaying was that of using his land for his own profit and pleasure. If he made it more than the source of his income—if, at the expense of his income, he suffered his country or his tenants to derive benefit from it—such was his pleasure, but such was more than his duty. He was entirely free to use it only for his own advantage.

His mere duty was economic and selfish, and to justify the latifundia economically from the landlord's point of view is easy. A very large amount of capital was invested in a mediæval manor in the form of the labour of manorial administration, the labour of all the tenant households, their implements and their draught animals, and their other animals which supplied food and manure. The returns on this capital were widely distributed: they had to lodge and feed and clothe the manorial officials and the tenants, to lodge and feed the animals, to provide for the storage, conversion, transport and marketing

of produce. They had to allow of that leakage for amusement and waste which is unavoidable where human beings are an element of production. They had at least to contribute to the upkeep of the church and priest. They had to provide the landlord with an income. It is clear that if the capital represented by the tenants, and their possessions were no longer invested in the land, a far greater proportion of the total returns would go to the landlord. It might be that the total returns would, at the same time, be greatly reduced because cultivation had become less intensive. Yet the land which supported, in addition to the landlord, only a small number of paid labourers, which was cultivated with little or no expenditure on implements, motive power or manure, would still yield the landlord a far greater income than it had done under the earlier system. The loss fell on the tenants and on the country's food-supply ; only the gain went to the landlord.

Latifundia have originated in widely separated times and places, but certain circumstances have constantly surrounded their birth. The first is a delocalisation of the landlords. The principal interest of the landlord who makes a latifundium is not the acres of his inheritance ; he prefers to them national politics or urban happenings and distractions or the fortunes of a distant country ; often he is an absentee. It is not only that he is without the love of his property which would make him provide for its good cultivation and the welfare of its occupiers. He desires that it shall yield him an income which is not only as large as possible but also easily collected, certain and

## 52 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

portable. He has little use for rents in kind or for rents varying with the weather and with the fortunes and ability of tenants. Secondly, latifundia have arisen where and when there has been an unusual demand for the products of pastoral farming—wool, meat and leather. Thirdly, they have often although not always followed on some event in history which has made way for them by thinning the population, so that they have been formed as much by neglect or inability to settle new tenants as by evictions of old tenants. And fourthly, they have been born and they have continued to live amid popular discontent. There were and are no more convinced believers in the theory that all tenants have rights as well as duties than the small cultivating landholders. From one end of Europe to another, from Shetland to Sicily and from Spain to Roumania the peasant has always seen the latifundium as an encroachment on his right.

In England the making of latifundia first became frequent after the Black Death. This epidemic was very deadly in England : it is said to have halved the population of the country. In many places whole families of customary tenants must have disappeared so that their holdings escheated to the lord of the manor who could add them to his demesne. It was largely by wage-earners that his demesne was now cultivated ; for in the fourteenth century the tenants in villeinage, now usually called customary tenants, commuted in many places in England their rents in kind and most of the services they owed for money rents, and those of them whose holdings were too small

to support them added to their incomes by earning wages. They did for hire the work which had once been done obligatorily as an incident of tenure in villeinage. The mortality due to the Black Death raised agricultural wages, so that landlords found that arable cultivation had become more costly. At the same time they found sheep farming more profitable than ever before because of the encouragement given by Edward III to the exporting of wool and to woollen manufactures. And so, many landlords put under grass their demesnes together with such former holdings of customary tenants as they could acquire. This was to narrow the market for agricultural labour and to injure the new generations whose numbers were not depleted by disease, but the small peasants—the cottars—suffered an even graver loss when certain landlords, interpreting their right in the commons as ownership, inclosed the manorial wastes and thus monopolised stock-keeping. It was the depopulation of many districts which first made these measures possible. They were encouraged by the Wars of the Roses which exhausted the old aristocracy with its tradition of landowning on the manorial system. The dissolution of religious houses further weakened the old economy, for it introduced, in place of the religious who had been large and generally enlightened landlords, a new class of landlords who were often adventurers and profiteers. The scrapping of standards implied by the Reformation produced cynicism and a contempt for tradition. The small circumstance that fish-days became flesh-days increased the demand for meat.

## 54 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

The famous Statute of Labourers of 1349 is an early example of the legislation which attempts to cancel the forces of history. It ruled that no labourer might refuse work paid for at the rate which obtained before the epidemic. But land continued to fall out of cultivation, and Tudor legislation sought to defeat the new tendency by directing itself against landlords rather than labourers. "Where in some towns two hundred persons were occupied and lived of their lawful labours," ran the preamble of an Act of 1489, "now there are occupied two or three herdsmen and the residue fall into idleness." It was ordained that wherever twenty acres of tilled land had been let with a house within the last three years this land should continue to be tilled on pain of the forfeiture of half the profits to the landlord or the king. Still, sheep farming made progress. "Some have twenty-four thousand sheep, some twenty thousand sheep, some ten thousand, some six thousand, some four thousand, and some more and some less," says an Act of 1536, which limited the number of sheep any person might keep to two thousand and forbade him to hold more than two tenements of husbandry at farm. These laws were not so effective that Bishop Latimer, preaching before the King in 1549, had not matter for a vigorous denunciation of the English makers of *latifundia*. "If the King's honour as some men say, standeth in the great multitude of people, then these graziers, inclosers and rent-rearers are hinderers of the King's honour. For where as have been a great many householders and inhabitants, there is now but a shepherd and

his dog. . . . We have good statutes made for the commonwealth, as touching commoners and inclosers ; many meetings and sessions ; but in the end of the matter there cometh nothing forth."

Sir Thomas More also commented on the inclosures, but from the more humane point of view, as they affected the dispossessed peasants rather than the wealth of the country :

Therefore that one covetous and insatiable cormorant and very plague of his native country may compass about and inclose many thousands of acres of ground within one pale or hedge, the husbandmen be thrust out of their own, or else either by cunning and fraud, or by violent oppression, they be put beside it, or by wrongs and injuries they be so wearied, that they be compelled to sell all : by one means therefore or by other, either by hook or crook, they must needs depart away, poor, silly, wretched souls, men, women, husbands, wives, fatherless children, widows, woeful mothers with their young babes, and their whole household small in substance and much in number, as husbandry requireth many hands. Away they trudge, I say, out of their known, accustomed houses, finding no place to rest in. All their household stuff, which is very little worth, they be constrained to sell it for a thing of nought.<sup>1</sup>

In 1597 the Act of 1488 was repealed, but a new Act ordered that all arable land made pasture since the first year of Elizabeth's reign should be brought back to tillage, and that no more land should be put under grass. None of this legislation was really effective in face of the big men's opportunity for large gains.

Another country in which latifundia had an early importance was the Roman Campagna. The land

<sup>1</sup> *Utopia*, trans. Ralph Robinson.

about Rome was the natural marching and camping ground of whoever made a warlike entry into the city and it suffered accordingly. Even more it suffered from the petty internecine wars of its landlords who from their strongholds, those *castelli* which still top so many crests of the Alban and Sabine Hills, swooped down on to the plains to raid and to harry. Rome was so great that for long she had neither leisure nor means to spare wherewith to tame her barons as more provincial towns, Florence and Genoa and Milan, tamed theirs. Tillage became less and less worth while and the former husbandmen of the Campagna crowded in the shelter of the *castelli*. The district, which was occupied by cultivated manors as late as the tenth century,<sup>1</sup> was a waste four hundred years later. In the fifteenth century the Pope at last reduced the barons to peace, but they had by then been definitely changed from lords of manors to *latifundisti*. The date at which malarial vapours came to complete the desolation, to guard the Campagna for centuries against habitation and tillage, is uncertain, but the infection seems to have been a consequence of desertion, and it is by cultivation and drainage that the Trappists have expelled it recently. The plain was, however, no longer a mere waste in the fifteenth century, as is proved by a safe-conduct of the Curia which Boniface IV gave in 1402 to the Apennine shepherds who brought their flocks to winter on the Campagna. As grazing land

<sup>1</sup> C. Calisse, *Le condizioni della proprietà territoriale studiate sui documenti della provincia romana dei secoli, VIII., IX., e X.* in Vols. VII. and VIII. of *Archivio della Reali Società di Storia Patria*.

for migrant and other flocks and herds, whose shepherds every night took refuge in Rome from the infection of malaria,<sup>1</sup> the Campagna had increasing economic value, while the barons became part of the highly urbanised aristocracy of Rome and cared for their land only as sources of rent. From 1660, a date for which there are figures, until 1873, when a law ended entails, half the land of the Campagna formed some seven properties of more than 10,000 acres, and 70 per cent. formed properties of more than 5,000 acres. All these latifundia were let to the middle men called *fittaioli* and *mercanti di campagna* who paid fixed rents to the landlords and made all the profit they could for themselves. The descendants of the ancient cultivators lived hardly here and there on the hillsides, leaving the plain to the shepherds. Since the rents paid for the winter pasturage of migrant flocks were nearly multiplied by eight between 1725 and 1885, the efforts of certain Popes to increase tillage towards the end of the eighteenth century were defeated.<sup>2</sup>

The early history of the *latifundia* in the kingdom of Naples, is much like that of those in the Roman Campagna: it is another story of war, devastation and disorder, of privileged migrant shepherds and of malaria. As early as 1155 William de Hauteville made a special constitution in favour of the shepherds of the Apulian plain, the so-called Tavoliere di Puglia, and a long series of usurpations and reinstatement.

<sup>1</sup> For a curious description of the Campagna in the early nineteenth century, see J. F. Lullin de Chateauvieux, *Lettres écrites d'Italie en 1812 et 1813 à Monsieur C. Pictet*.

<sup>2</sup> Werner Gombart, *Die römische Campagna*.



ments affected the paths across cultivated lands which led wandering flocks to and from these Apulian pasturages.<sup>1</sup> A later difference between the fortunes of Roman and of Southern Italian *latifundia* is due to the different policies of the rulers. For the Bourbon Kings of Naples directly encouraged the under-cultivation of *latifundia* by putting a premium on the absenteeism of landlords. By inducing the aristocracy to abandon their ancestral castles and neglect their properties and to settle in the town of Naples, the monarchy made itself the only power in the country. Absenteeism became the fashion, and the landowning *borghesi* followed the noble landlords to the capital. The lack of roads and insecurity of travelling helped further to urbanise the upper and middle classes while heavy taxes more and more diminished the number of small owners. The strong tendency was to drain all the wealth of the kingdom into Naples in the form of rent and of taxes, and to use the taxes not productively but as pay for an overgrown bureaucracy formed out of the classes divorced from the soil. The exploited peasants retaliated, before the great emigratory movement from South Italy to America, by brigandage, and this had the good effect of making pastoral farming risky and thus eventually increasing tillage. The Commissioners of 1881 to 1886 found that the plains of Basilicata and some adjacent land in Apulia had grown fertile in the last decade, partly because brigandage, together with a fall in the price of meat and wool, had made sheep-farming less profitable.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W. N. Beauclerk, *Rural Italy*, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> *Inchiesta Agraria*.

No country has suffered so much from *latifundia* as Spain. Their Spanish history, like their English history, began in the fourteenth century, partly as a consequence of the Black Death, and like the English and Roman *latifundia* those of Spain were helped by an effect of Renaissance civilisation, the enlarged demand for wool. No wool was in greater request than that of the Spanish merinos, and Ferdinand and Isabella were influenced to foster sheep-farming and to grant privileges to the historic shepherds' association called the *Mesta*. The great flocks of the *Mesta* were herded to the mountains in spring, to the plains in autumn, had rights of pasturage in the commons on their road, privileges of passage, rights and privileges so often defined that they were evidently indefinite. These flocks were a fruitful source of profit to the country's foreign trade, but an infliction to the farmers over whose fields they travelled. In 1526 they were said to number about five and a half million merino sheep.<sup>1</sup>

The economic policy which treated sheep-farming as a favoured industry hampered the small cultivator and encouraged the formation of large grazing properties. But the historical event most responsible for the great undercultivated *latifundia* of Spain is the expulsion from the country of the Moors and of their descendants the Moriscoes. This was in progress while sheep-farmers were receiving special privileges. Ferdinand and Isabella in the interests of pastoral farming forbade all inclosures, without royal licence, of the land reconquered from the Moors in Granada,

<sup>1</sup> Julius Klein, *The Mesta*, Cambridge, U.S.A., 1920.

and granted leases of whole tracts in Estremadura and Toledo to the *Mesta*. It was in the sixteenth century that the *Mesta* reached its summit of prosperity. Meanwhile, Philip II completed the work of deporting the Moriscoes, and when the last of them had gone landlords were unable, however willing they might be, to attract new tenants to the lands left vacant, which had under the Moors been cultivated by the manorial system, and which had been well populated and highly productive. The void was too great to be filled by any people with the promptness demanded by the needs of agriculture, far less by a people whom a colonial empire and long wars had already drained of their superfluity. Heavy taxes and harsh land-laws made a bad position worse.

Whole villages disappeared ; others from populous and prosperous became wretched hamlets ; wide tilled areas were abandoned to waste.<sup>1</sup> The great south-western districts of Estremadura and Andalusia became and have remained a country of undeveloped pasturelands, owned in large estates by landlords whose sole interest in their property is in their rents. They let to farmers who make what profit they can during the term of their lease. In the Estremaduran province of Caceres in 1914 twelve landlords owned 230,116 acres, so that the average holding of each—invariably farmed as a single unit—was 19,176 acres. This province is called the “ typical district of large pasturelands held by owners who are absentees and

<sup>1</sup> Francisco de Cardenas, *Ensayo sobre la Historia de la Propriedad territorial en España*, Madrid, 1873.

attend to their property only for the purpose of receiving their rents. It is a cattle country *par excellence*, with a privileged climate and good soil, and yet artificial meadows are hardly known in it." <sup>1</sup>

From the seventeenth century onwards Spain as a whole has produced live stock on its latifundia, and wine and fruit in its more settled areas, but has grown little corn. It was and is unable to support any but a small population, and ever since the seventeenth century it has sent a steady flow of landless and unemployed emigrants to the South American countries which were long Spanish colonies. Its population, said to have been between twenty and thirty millions in the Middle Ages, was about seven and a half millions in 1762,<sup>2</sup> less than fifteen and a half millions in 1857, and less than twenty millions in 1910.

There is a contrast between the expulsion of the Moors and Moriscoes from Spain and the waste they left behind them, and the withdrawal from the Hungarian plain of another Mahometan people, the Turks. This latter event was followed by a formation of latifundia which is exceptional. Unlike the Moors, the Turks were not good farmers and they deserved to be turned out. The area of more than eleven thousand square miles which they left vacant in Hungary passed to Christians who enormously increased its agricultural wealth. The new Hungarian

<sup>1</sup> Visconde de Eza, *El Problema agrario en España*, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> *A New Account of the Inhabitants, Trade and Government of Spain*, London, 1762.

## 62 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

landlords did indeed form on the vacated plain latifundia which were at first, for the most part, given up to cattle breeding. But gradually in the eighteenth century they brought tillers to these lands so that many of them lost their character of latifundia. In the end the district has become one of Europe's great cornfields.<sup>1</sup>

A modern and less happy instance of a formation of latifundia, one which was at the expense of small cultivators, occurred in the Scottish Highlands in the earlier nineteenth century. A great part of the pacification carried out by the English Government after the 'Forty-five was the abolition of the hereditary jurisdictions and the raising of the Highland regiments, two measures which turned the lairds from chieftains into landowners and officers of the British Army. They were delocalised and their need of money was increased, and at the same time the roads which were made as another pacificatory measure delocalised Highland economics, bringing many glens and even islands into the orbit of exchange and making money a general necessity. The lands of the townships were in this period divided for the most part into the small, self-dependent farms called crofts, and the crofters were expected not only to support themselves but also to pay rents which would give their landlords incomes in money at least equal to those of Lowland lairds. At first, because potato-growing and kelp-burning were new sources of income to the crofters, they were able to fulfil expectations. But the failure

<sup>1</sup> Henry Marczali, *Hungary in the Eighteenth Century* (trans. A. B. Yolland), pp. 25, 46 *et seq.*

of the potato crop in the 'forties and the nearly simultaneous fall in the demand for kelp were nothing short of disastrous to these peasants. In many districts they were brought to extremest want and were hardly kept alive except by charity ; to collect full rents from them was outside every bound of possibility, and after nearly a century there could be no question of a return to the primitive economy which had prevailed before the rising. It was at this time that a considerable number of Highland lairds took the step of turning crofters off their land and including the crofts in large sheep farms. The evicted tenants recruited the industrial population of Glasgow, or crowded miserably in small towns and coast villages, or, in large numbers, they emigrated. A little later some landlords discovered a new expedient for realising the value of latifundia, in that they added the lands of former crofts to their deer-forests which they were able to let for fantastically high rents. The wrongs of the evicted tenants caused a scandal which led to the Crofters' Holding Act of 1886 and to subsequent statutes, all more or less effective checks on further unjust evictions. But, perhaps because the flow of emigration was now mainly spontaneous, the depopulation of the Highlands continued as it still continues, and the latifundia expanded. The area covered by deer-forests in the five northern counties—Caithness, Sutherland, Ross and Cromarty, Inverness and Argyll—increased by more than a million acres between 1883 and 1912, and the Deer Forests Commission reported in 1895 that one and a half million acres

## 64 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

of waste land in these counties were such as could be used for forming smallholdings

To these examples of the making of latifundia a last and very recent one must be added from Sicily. The process was in this instance one of enlarging latifundia rather than of forming them anew, but it was attended by all the circumstances which have accompanied the putting of land to this use since the fourteenth century. There was depopulation, due to the great number of the peasants who were serving in the army. There was a large war demand for the products of pastoral farming—meat, milk and wool. There were landlords who cared for their property only as a source of income. The consequence was the inclusion in the existing latifundia of extensive additional areas of grasslands. Hence, in great part, the seizure of land by bands of peasants in 1918 and 1920.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See my article in *The Country Heart*, January 1922.

## CHAPTER V

### THE SERVILE PEASANT

A PECULIAR odium has ever since the French Revolution attached to the institution of a cultivating tenantry bound not by contract but by custom. It is held to be essentially unjust that a man should be born into a state which implies obligations, and just that he should incur obligations by agreement. Every circumstance which hampers his freedom of agreement is resented : thus it is sometimes stated that an agricultural labourer should not own a cottage and plot of land, as he often does in the Continental countries, because he is thereby debarred from roaming far and wide to find work ; his market is restricted to the radius within reach of his cottage. This exorbitant prejudice for freedom as such, which will not be modified by proof of man's other prejudices, those due to his various loyalties, his general instinct for ownership and his frequent love for the land, should lead logically to a repudiation of every form of property except ready money. In consistency, the only tolerated society should receive wages from a state which alone might own capital. For only ready money is fluid ; every other kind of property is in some degree a tie. And property in land is certainly the most hampering, the most stabilising



of all. It cannot but be odious to a clear-thinking revolutionary. From the duke who owns a province to the peasant who holds a few acres securely, the whole landholding class is handicapped if a cheerful expectancy of violent changes be the goal of society.

These are the academic views of extremists. The person interested in actual life does not regard the customary tenure of land as objectionable in essence and of necessity, but seeks which of its conditions are an offence to manhood and an impediment to husbandry. These conditions are found not to attach invariably to the position of a customary tenant ; that a tenant in villeinage or his descendant might be and often was a righteous, self-respecting and respected person and a good husbandman was shown in the second chapter of this book. But his tenure was capable of such debasement that it became servile really as well as technically. For first, his disability to migrate freely from his holding might not have its compensating right ; he might hold only at the will of his landlord, who could at any time evict him as the Highland crofters were evicted in the nineteenth century. Secondly, the services he discharged on his lord's demesne might be indeterminate, arbitrarily fixed and changed at his lord's pleasure, and similarly, his rent might not be defined. Thirdly, a landlord might make tyrannical use of jurisdictional powers over tenants. And fourthly, a tenant's holding might be so reduced that his condition became one of wretchedness : its cultivable area might be lessened by the lord's encroachments ; or its productiveness might suffer from the depredations of privileged

flocks and herds and of preserved game, or from the lord's failure to fulfil an obligation to supply buildings, implements, animals, plants, seeds or manure; or the tenant might lose his common rights—his part-ownership or usufruct of pasture and woodland, so important to his husbandry; or, finally, the tenant's use of such necessities as the lord's mill, his winepress and his bakehouse might be made burdensome.

The connection popularly established between the unhappiness and injustice which could thus be inflicted on peasants and the state of France before the Revolution is mostly legendary. The French peasant had his bad times, the worst of them the consequence of war. The Hundred Years' War, the Wars of Religion, the Fronde: he had to bear more than his share of the miseries these entailed, and he was so placed that it was almost impossible for him to be a war profiteer. During the Hundred Years' War there occurred the great peasant rising called the Jacquerie, and it came, like all class rebellions, from people who were debarred from realising their own standard of prosperity and order. Those who have been oppressed through long ages do not rebel, not, at any rate, until a period of comparative means and leisure has stimulated their imagination so that they have an ideal standard of living. The French peasants had not been miserable in the thirteenth century, as was shown in the second chapter of this book. They had acquired a habit of intelligent and hopeful living, and it was this which caused them to resent their sufferings when, during the Hundred Years' War, their fields were wasted by armies, and

they themselves were the prey of disorderly underpaid soldiers and of brigands whom disorder bred. This overlong war gave the chivalrous class ideals too exclusively military, which diverted their sympathies from the peasants, and it demoralised them, making some of them greedy, cruel or capricious landlords.<sup>1</sup> The old cleavage between the two classes, thus deepened, was, however, an advantage to the peasants in that it encouraged them to organise separately; and in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries many village communities acquired charters from their landlords whose great need was for a fixed income. In this way the communal life of French villages attained to a development beyond any in England. And the final result of the Hundred Years' War was also damaging to the power of the landlord class in that it gave new independence to the villages. The ultimate results of the Wars of Religion and the Fronde were the same. While all this fighting and the disease in its train scattered death and pain and wretchedness, wiped out whole families in every class, ruined farms and villages even more than castles, destroyed the wealth invested in the land, its most lasting effect was borne by the chivalrous class who were the fighters. The other powers in the country, the Crown and the peasants, ended by being gainers. It was not only that many villages acquired charters in which the reciprocal rights of landlord and tenants were defined. It became the policy of the central government to depress the

<sup>1</sup> See Siméon Luce, *Histoire de la Jacquerie d'après les documents inédits*, Paris, 1895.

landlords, as the element of disorder, and to protect the peasants as a valuable producing class. Thus Henry IV, Louis XIII and Louis XIV, intervened to preserve common rights in forests. The States General of Orleans and Blois, in 1560 and 1579, forbade the imposition by landlords of arbitrary aids and new tolls, limited the rights of landlords to shoot and hunt on sown land, and forbade them to force marriages on the daughters of their vassals. During Richelieu's ministry a royal edict ordered all strongholds not on the frontiers to be razed to the ground. The violence of some landlords, the arbitrary imprisonments, even the executions of their tenants of which they were occasionally guilty, were severely punished and suppressed by Louis XIV.

Fléchier, in his memoirs of the *Grands-Jours* held at Auvergne in 1665, shows very clearly this alliance between the Crown and the peasants against the landlords. The ministers who travelled with the king's justice were dreaded by the landlords, while the peasants confidently looked to them for protection.

I remarked through the country and in Clermont, when I arrived there, that terror was general. All the nobility was in flight. Those who had been the tyrants of the poor were becoming their suppliants, and more restitutions were being made than in the great jubilee of the Holy Year.

A certain Monsieur de Montvallat was tried on this occasion for unjustly imprisoning a peasant in his dungeon and was condemned to the confiscation of his property and to banishment, a sentence

## 70 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

eventually commuted for a fine of eight thousand *livres*.

It was remarked (writes Fléchier) while this affair was in course, that the peasants were very bold and willingly gave evidence against the nobles when they were not restrained by fear. If they are spoken to disrespectfully or do not receive a civil greeting, they talk of the *Grands-Jours*, threaten the person concerned that they will have him punished, and protest violently. A lady of the country complained that all her peasants had bought gloves. They believed, she said, that they were no longer bound to work and that the king considered only them in all his kingdom. When persons of quality, of wit and of excellent morals, who did not fear the strictest justice and who had won the goodwill of the people, came to Clermont, these good folk assured them of their protection and furnished evidence of their life and morals, believing that they necessarily depended on this evidence, and that they themselves, by the privilege of their lords, had become lords. They were moreover persuaded that the king was sending this company merely to reinstate them in their property, however they might have sold it, and they counted as their heritage all that their ancestors, up to the third generation, had sold.<sup>1</sup>

According to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, an extraordinary change for the better in the material condition of the peasantry was effected in the first half of the eighteenth century.

France is so much improved (she writes in 1739) it is not to be known to be the same country we passed through twenty years ago. Everything I see speaks in praise of Cardinal Fleury; the roads are all mended, and the greatest part of them paved as well as the streets of Paris, planted on both sides like the roads in Holland; and such good care taken against robbers that you may cross the country with

<sup>1</sup> *Memoires sur les grands-jours d'Auvergne en 1665* (ed. 1862), pp. 53, 168-70.

your purse in your hand. . . . The French are more changed than their roads ; instead of pale yellow faces, wrapped up in blankets, as we saw them, the villages are all filled with fresh-coloured, lusty peasants, in good cloth and clean linen. It is incredible, the air of plenty and content that is over the whole country.

Thirty-six years later Horace Walpole wrote of the efforts of the king and of " Messieurs de Malesherbes and Turgot " to protect the peasants at the expense of the landlords. The king was attempting " to take off " the customary works, " that quintessence of cruel and ostentatious despotism, but the country gentlemen, that race of interested stupidity, will baffle him."

Since the close of the Middle Ages some demesnes had disappeared as the effect of leases and alienations : there were landlords to whom no right remained but that to receive a few rents. The rights of others had been subdivided. Yet others were so impoverished that they gladly sold or let their lands, put their portionless daughters in convents, and obtained military bursaries for their sons and places at court for themselves. Much of the absenteeism was only partly voluntary. But there was also a minority of landlords who could well have afforded to live in their castles and yet used them as mere places of summer residence, preferring Paris. The increasing power of the central government had robbed them of the landlordly functions which had given them an occupation ; and they did not become farmers like some of their compeers in other countries, but courtiers and politicians. Absenteeism was, on the whole,

## 72 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

advantageous to peasant independence. As for the landlords who stayed at home, they were generally the poorer of their class, some of them far too poor to be a menace to their tenants' liberty. There were popular songs which made fun of them :

*C'est un gentilhomme de Beauce  
Qui se tient au lit quand on refait ses chausses.*

What were the duties to the landlord which, in the eighteenth century, limited the rights of property of customary tenants in France? Their ancient rents in kind were sometimes a proportion of produce and thus still significant, but more often they had long since been commuted for a quit-rent which had, with the fall in the value of money, become trifling. A fine payable when a holding was alienated was sometimes as much as a quarter of the sale-price and may have hindered property from changing hands frequently. It was historical and it made for stability and prevented too much subdivision of holdings, but when, as the government was centralised, the contract of sale came to be guaranteed not by the landlord but by royal authority, it could in equity be resented. Feudal aids had long been undetermined and had been raised on the slightest pretext in the fifteenth century. But in the seventeenth century they had been reduced to the historic aids, paid everywhere during the Middle Ages, and of these the aid for the knighting of the lord's eldest son and that for the ransoming of the lord himself were in desuetude. Only the aid for the dowry of the lord's

eldest daughter remained and it was fixed at an inconsiderable sum, four times the quit-rent. The *corvées*, the forced labour regularly rendered by tenants, had been limited in the sixteenth century to twelve days a year, and the occasional labour exacted from them, for instance carting, had in some districts been similarly determined and reduced in this and the next century. Craftsmen were everywhere exempted from forced labour.

The only vestige of jurisdictionary power which remained to the landlord in the eighteenth century was his right to nominate the magistrate. From the time when the Parliament of Paris was established the peasant was able to sue in a public court of law.

In some places the landlord still levied tolls, inequitably since responsibility for the maintenance of roads and bridges had passed from him to the state. The obligation to use his mill, oven and winepress, paying him fees, was resented and was often successfully evaded. Probably the most real grievance of the cultivators was due to the preservation of game and fishing which was especially strict on Crown land. In the interests of sport the peasants were forbidden to make unauthorised inclosures, to cut their barley before the feast of St. John, or to weed while the partridges were on the ground. But resentment of the game-laws was more or less local. While in some districts the landlords took away their tenants' guns and killed their dogs, in Brittany and Vendée they shot with them.

It is seen that landlords derived little material



## 74 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

profit from their customary tenants in the eighteenth century. Often even the due rents were not collected. When the richer landlords who had become courtiers visited their estates, bringing great retinues with them, a new tide of life, at once disorganising and profitable, came to the village. It was difficult and impolitic to resist the large and inconvenient occasional demands of these great persons, so ignorant of country life, whose expenditure of money was so valuable.

Vous savez qu'on fait les foins (writes Madame de Sévigné from Brittany in July 1671). Je n'avois pas d'ouvriers ; j'envoie dans cette prairie, que les poètes ont célébrée, prendre tous ceux qui travailloient, pour venir nettoyer ici : vous n'y voyez encore goutte ; et, en leur place, j'envoie tous mes gens faner. Savez-vous ce que c'est de faner ? Il faut que je vous l'explique : faner est la plus jolie chose du monde, c'est retourner du foin en batifolant dans une prairie, dès qu'on sait tant, on sait faner.

There could hardly be a bond of sympathy between an urbanised landlord and his tenants ; absenteeism strengthened not only the independence of the peasants but also the class-feeling both of them and of their superiors. In the later eighteenth century there was a tendency, on the part of some needy lords, to greater strictness. Accumulated arrears of rents were collected ; rents in kind were fraudulently measured ; there were encroachments on the commons and attempts to exact forced labour on the scale of a past age. In these enterprises some Breton *hobereaux*, homekeeping bonnet-lairds, were not behindhand with the courtiers. But the peasants were far

removed from the meekness which accepts oppression dumbly, and down to the very eve of the Revolution there were landlords, especially in Brittany and Vendée, who maintained even affectionate relations with them. "J'ai vu des exemples que je pourrais citer," said Mirabeau, "de communautés, qui se sont rachetées de leur seigneur, qui voulait les vendre pour se rendre à lui."<sup>1</sup>

The overweening power of the landlords had long since had its day. It was in the eighteenth century a less danger to peasant independence than the increasing arrogations of the central government.<sup>2</sup> The English view of rural France under the old system of government has been too much influenced by Arthur Young, who travelled with an Englishman's prejudice in favour of high farming. His impressions should be compared with those of Dr. Edward Rigby, a skilled observer of rural conditions, who went through France in 1789. "We saw many most agreeable scenes as we passed along in the evening before we came to Lisle," he wrote in the first days of July when the Bastille still seemed to stand as strongly as ever ;

little parties sitting at their doors ; some of the men smoking, some playing at cards in the open air, and others spinning cotton. Everything we see bears the mark of industry, and

<sup>1</sup> Albert Babeau, op. cit., p. 170.

<sup>2</sup> For detailed studies of rural France under the old régime see Henri Sée, *Les classes rurales et le régime domanial en France au moyen âge*, and *Les classes rurales en Bretagne* ; Albert Babeau, *Le village sous l'ancien régime* and *La vie rurale dans l'ancienne France* ; and Henri Doniol, *Serfs et Vilains au moyen âge*, *La Révolution française et la féodalité*, *Histoire des classes rurales en France et de leurs progrès dans l'égalité civile et la propriété*.

all the people look happy. We have indeed seen few signs of opulence in individuals, for we do not see so many gentlemen's seats as in England, but then we have seen few of the lower classes in rags, idleness and misery. . . . The men are strong and athletic, and the face of the country shows that industry is not discouraged. The women, too—I speak of the lower class, which in all countries is the largest and most useful—are strong and well made and seem to do a great deal of labour, especially in the country. They carry great burdens and seem to be employed to go to market with the produce of the fields and gardens on their backs. An Englishwoman would perhaps think this hard, but the cottagers in England are certainly not so well off; I am sure they do not look so happy. These women . . . have all very good caps on, their hair powdered, earrings, necklaces and crosses. . . . What strikes me most in what I have seen is the wonderful difference between this country and England. I don't know what we may think by and by, but at present the difference seems to be in favour of the former; if they are not happy they look at least very like it.

Dr. Rigby's opinion "by and by," when he had travelled through Central, Southern and Western France, was unchanged: his first impressions were typical. The legend of an oppressed French peasantry must be ascribed first to the high ideal of personal liberty evolved in France at this time, secondly to individual instances of oppression, and thirdly to the degree of civilisation to which the peasants had attained and which made them resent, as well as oppressiveness, all formal limitations of their freedom and the contempt with which the landlord and burgher classes regarded them.

The German peasants had histories different from those of the French peasants and different in the several parts of Germany. The Elbe was the utter-

most limit of Charlemagne's conquests, and that very great man did really fling the civilisation of the West as far as the boundaries of his Empire. But east of the Elbe was a land which the Germans colonised late, where population was thin and estates were large, and where the landlords continued to have a way with their tenants which was a little like that of conquerors with the vanquished. The west, centre and south of Germany were, on the other hand, densely populated in the Middle Ages, and were dotted with towns which had highly developed municipal institutions and active inhabitants with many wants. In these parts of Germany the properties of landlords came to be much divided ; there came to be many *Streubesitzer*, landlords whose holdings were made up of rights held in a number of scattered pieces of ground. The class of the immediate landlords, that of the *Ritter*, became overgrown. Its members, whose code debarred them from all professions but those of the priest, the soldier, and the courtier, were more than landlordship could support, and were too much preoccupied by poverty to be consistent or dangerous oppressors. "A very large part of the knightly class supplied their daily needs with more care and trouble than most peasants."¹ For the peasant prospered easily in this fertile country where thriving towns supplied excellent markets for agricultural produce. This was really the story-book Germany which was made in our childhood so important a part of the mental make-up of all of us Europeans : the

¹ Theodor von der Goltz, *Geschichte der deutschen Landwirtschaft*, I. 182.

dignified, slightly ridiculous landlords; the small, rich, busy, stately, amusing Gothic towns; the immense forests, the vineyards, the well-tilled fields; the solid comfort of the peasant farms. There were peasant risings repeatedly in the fifteenth century and the great Peasants' War began in 1524. None of this unrest occurred in the north-east, where peasants were truly servile, and little of it in the north-west: its seat was the rich provinces where peasants were accustomed to well-being, and where their holdings were thick on the ground—Alsace, Lorraine, Baden, Suabia, Franconia, Thuringia, Hesse, the Palatine. These peasants often visited towns so that they had many opportunities for talk and knew how men lived in other positions than theirs. The articles of the claims which they published in 1525 are illuminating. First, they asked that parishes might have the right to choose their own parish priests, and if need were to depose them. The influence of Luther is apparent, and also the considerable development of communal life in the parishes. Secondly, they declared themselves willing to pay the great tithes, but not the small tithes since "God created the beasts for men." This exclusion of grain and of the Church from relation to manhood is presumably also due to Luther. Thirdly, they demanded that peasant bondage might end "since Christ with His dear blood set free and redeemed all men, from the herd to the highest. The peasants will live by God's commandments and obey chosen and established lords, but they will be the property of no lord." Here they seem to be objecting to the

tie to the land which prevented them from migrating from an estate at will and caused their duty to pass to a new landlord whenever an estate changed hands. It was a tie which had been uncertain and often disputed in South and Central Germany. Probably they were objecting also to the contempt in which, as traditional bondsmen, they were held by the knightly and burgher classes with whom they were in frequent contact. They wished to rid themselves of this slur on their repute. Fourthly, they voiced a universal grievance of peasants: they desired that fishing and hunting should no longer be preserved by the landlords and that game should not be allowed to destroy the seed in the fields. They protested next against certain abuses: they asked that the forests might be common property as they had been of old, that peasants might not be forced to buy from the lord the wood which they had a right to take for themselves, that arable and meadowland might not encroach upon common pastures. Of customary services, they stated that they had recently been increased. They asked that regular services should be determined by an agreement between the landlords and their tenants, and professed themselves ready also to render all extraordinary services which did not interfere with their own farming and for which they received fit wages. They complained that rents were too high, and asked that they might be revised by an arbitrator. They complained of liability to new punishments, imposed not by custom but by envy and partiality. They complained of the custom by which the best animal on a holding

escheated to the landlord on the death of the tenant. It was, they said, "against God and against widows and orphans." Finally, they declared themselves ready to relinquish any one of their articles of which it could be said that it was contrary to God's word.

The proud men who presented the articles had reached the summit of their fortunes. The Peasants' War was savagely fought by the landlords who were complete victors in it, and who reacted after it to great tyranny and injustice towards tenants beaten to meekness. And this reaction occurred not only in the regions where there had been unrest, but also and especially in the north-east. Everywhere peasants were depressed below their condition in the late Middle Ages. In the seventeenth century the miserable Thirty Years' War further worsened their state. It was a war in which, for half a lifetime, districts were recurrently, monotonously devastated, so that not a cultivator in them could keep up his heart ; the soldiers were not defenders of their country, but mostly of the professional, adventurer type, irregularly paid, ready to murder and rob ; there was much disease. The total loss to the population of the country is variously estimated at from a half to three-quarters. The flocks and herds were certainly halved at the least ; much cultivated land became waste ; buildings fell into ruins ; the market for agricultural produce was narrowed ; moral standards were lowered. There was not, as in France, a strong central government to protect the peasants, and a large share of the heavy burden fell on them. This

was lastingly true in the north-east. In the south, centre and west the peasantry returned to comparative freedom and considerable well-being a couple of generations after the Peace of Westphalia, when the country had recovered from the war, and land which had been left fallow for a time had been brought back to tillage and had proved more fertile than ever before. In these districts landlordship was still greatly subdivided and immediate landlords had little wealth and power. But east of the Elbe the landlords formed a much propertied and an arrogant aristocracy. They were not absentees in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, like the French landlords. They were rather like the English landowners in that they were country gentlemen, interested in farming, whose endeavour it was as far as possible to monopolise and distribute the produce of farming. Therefore, they included in their home farms common lands and land which had formerly been part of tenants' holdings. They did not indeed turn all peasants into landless men, as was done in the larger part of England, but they added greatly to the class which held at the lord's pleasure a cottage and a small plot of ground but no fields, and which depended mainly on earnings.

Servile tenure at its most vicious development, hardly distinguishable from slavery, was illustrated on their properties. A Pomeranian law, promulgated in 1616, defines in a curious mixture of German and Latin the position which was the typical one of the peasant, not only in this province but also in East and West Prussia, Brandenburg and Silesia.



## 82 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

The peasants in our land and duchy are not holders of emphyteuses, hereditary rentpayers or leaseholders, but bondsmen, *homines proprii et coloni glebæ adscripti*. They pay only a trifling rent for the steadings and arable and meadowland granted to them to hold, but they must all render undetermined, unlimited and indefinite customary work. They and their sons are not competent to quit their steadings and holdings without leave from their overlords and without emancipation from bondage. The steadings and arable and meadowland belong wholly and solely to the overlords of each place, so that the peasants and settlers have in them, either of their own property-right or otherwise, no *dominium nec directum nec utile nec libellario nec censuali*; nor have they *exceptionem perpetuæ coloniæ* in right of the fact that they and their fathers have occupied the steadings for fifty, sixty or even a hundred years.

Therefore peasants' sons must not settle in a new place without the knowledge of their overlords, as their hereditary lords, and if an overlord resume immediate tenure of any steadings or transfer peasants to new holdings, they must suffer this without resistance. When, however, the transference is in places where steadings are saleable, the new steading must be of the same worth as the old. But when peasants are fully evicted from their steadings, and home farm buildings are erected on these, they must go unresistingly, and must cede steading, arable and meadowland and appurtenances to their overlord. But it then behoves the overlord, according to ancient use, to emancipate them with all their live-stock and their goods and chattels, and without payment to free them and their children from bondage, and also, if the steading be alienable, to pay them its price, such price to be for the steading but not for the land, and to give them notice to quit in good time, about a year beforehand.

It must be because peasants built their own houses and outhouses that they were thus recognised to have a limited right to be bought out of their steadings. Some of the provisions of this law were repeated in an ordinance of 1724, which further stated that a peasant had no right of property even in his chattels.

At his death they were to be inventoried and sealed and left until the lord had taken what fell to him by custom. A peasant's children were declared to be bondsmen, incompetent to marry a free person unless they learnt a handicraft.<sup>1</sup>

The position of the servile tenants in France before the Revolution may be taken to be the best to which they attained until their full emancipation; that in North-East Germany in the eighteenth century was probably worse than any other outside the Balkan Peninsula. In Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, in Poland and in Hungary, their emancipation did not come until well on in the nineteenth century. In Hungary, as in Germany, there was, in the early sixteenth century, a peasants' rising, after which the tenants' independence was lessened by reactionary forces. In Poland, certain landlords greatly extended their demesnes between the fifteenth century and the middle of the sixteenth. In all the Central European countries the peasants lost ground in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and had to lower the standard of freedom which they had been able to maintain in the late Middle Ages. Partly this was due to the strengthening power and the growing arrogance and exclusiveness of the aristocracy. Partly it was a result of the new knowledge of agriculture which made landlordship potentially very profitable. All over Central Europe there came to be two kinds of landlords. There was first the landlord of the mediæval type who on his demesne produced only

<sup>1</sup> The best history of the German peasantry is that of Freiherr Theodor von der Goltz (op. cit.).

## 84 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

for the needs of his household, and who derived his further income from the customary rents paid to him in kind and in money. Secondly, there was the landlord whose chief dependence was on his home farm, whose object it therefore was to enlarge its area whenever possible, and to exact from his tenants forced labour to the utmost limit. The landlords of this kind predominated in North-East Germany, but they were also important in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, in Hungary and in Poland. In all these latter countries there were the large highly cultivated farms of the landlords, the peasants who held only a cottage standing in its plot of land and the landless hired labourers. But in none of these countries was the condition of the peasants so depressed as in North-East Germany; they were protected by the Imperial power in the States subject to the Austrian Emperors, and in Poland the aristocratic landlord class was saved from extreme exclusiveness by its large numbers and was united to the tenants by the bond of common patriotism. Moreover, in all these countries there were, as well as the poor peasants who were little better than agricultural labourers, the well-to-do farmers whose dependence on their landlords was little more than formal. These are fertile lands, in which a small farmer easily thrives. That peasant farmers have thriven in them for generations is proved by contemporary literature, by many buildings, by many stored household treasures, by the advanced development of rural arts. In Hungary the servile tenants constituted in the eighteenth century "a complete and organised

order from the holders of big farms to the cottagers without land or cattle,"<sup>1</sup> and this statement is also true of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, and of Poland. In Moravia there were, at the end of this century, some sixty thousand peasant farms to some hundred thousand cottagers' holdings.<sup>2</sup> In Poland, in 1872, 40 per cent. of the land in peasant tenure was made up of holdings of more than fifteen acres.<sup>3</sup>

In the Balkan Peninsula the great misery of the customary tenants of land was an effect of modern history. In Roumania the power of the landlords increased, and the condition of the peasants was made more strictly servile after the wars of the late sixteenth century. They were then subjected to conditions much like those which bound customary tenants in Central and West Europe. But in the eighteenth century, under the government of the Phanarotes, both they and their landlords were depressed, and were at the same time wounded in their patriotism. The risings of 1763-5 and of 1821 were on the part both of landlords and of peasants. There followed the nineteenth century in which army after army pursued a devastating course across Roumania. The result was a country in which land-

<sup>1</sup> H. Marczali, *Hungary in the Eighteenth Century* (trans. A. B. Yolland), p. 170.

<sup>2</sup> For accounts of the customary tenants in all these countries see H. Marczali, *op. cit.*; Karl Grünberg, *Die Bauernbefreiung und die Auslösung des gutsherrlichbauerlichen Verhältnisses in Böhmen, Mähren und Schlesien*; *Das Königreich Polen. Topographische und statistische Skizzen* (Leipzig 1864); *Polen. Entwicklung und gegenwärtiger Zustand* (Berne 1918).

<sup>3</sup> *Vie économique de la Pologne* (Vol. III. of *Encyclopédie polonaise*, Lausanne and Paris, 1919), pp. 423, 424.

lords were absentees, careless of their land and of their tenants, in which peasants lived wretchedly, neglecting every law of agriculture. The fact that an ancient custom prevented the landlords from holding more than one-third of their property in demesne could not save from extreme poverty peasants who did not follow even the most primitive system of crop rotation. The more enterprising of them emigrated to adjoining lands where cultivators were needed and could prosper—Transylvania, Bulgaria, Serbia. The Roumanian villages “make one sick at heart,” wrote Monsieur de Laveleye in 1886.

No accumulated capital, no farm buildings, some ploughing implements but only of the worst kind, no stored goods, not even firewood. . . . The aspect of this countryside and of these villages is of a desolating uniformity. Save where maize is sown, the earth is everywhere yellowish, and the thatched mud dwellings have the same dull, sad hue. Sometimes branches with dead, yellow leaves are placed on posts to protect the fronts of the houses. Not one gay or brilliant colour. . . . How could a landowner settle on his lands where he would find no shade, no water, no agreeable view, no occupation of any kind since the peasants till the soil in the most summary and uniform way? Like the landlords of South Italy and Sicily he takes refuge in towns, in watering-places, or in the casinos in which he can gamble.<sup>1</sup>

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the peasants enjoyed, on the whole, careless landlords until the eighteenth century. Then when the Turkish power was

<sup>1</sup> Emile de Laveleye, *La Péninsule des Balkans* (Bruxelles, 1886). See also Charles Arion, *La situation économique et sociale des paysans en Roumanie*, and C. Boeresco, *De l'amélioration de l'état des paysans roumains* (Paris, 1861).

decadent, when the janissaries were no longer paid soldiers living in barracks, but had come to hold land out of which they desired to make as much income as possible, there was a change. Conditions became worse than anywhere in Christian Europe, because, while the peasants were Christians, the landlords were Mahometans, either Turks or the descendants of apostate Serbs. The relations between the two classes were those of mistrust and contempt, sharpened, from time to time, to vindictive hatred ; and the landlords used their tenants with a senseless, greedy harshness and a frequent cruelty which made them monotonously miserable. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, writing in 1717, gives a companion picture of the sufferings of the Serbs before they expelled the Turks. In Macedonia the condition of the peasantry was the same, or even more wretched, and continued so until the Great War. Even now it is unlikely that the Jugoslavian agrarian reform of 1921 has had sufficient effect to emancipate the Macedonian serfs completely.<sup>1</sup>

Servile tenure of land did not only remain the predominant tenure among the cultivators of many European countries until a very recent date, but also left vestiges where it was superseded. But the individualistic tendencies of societies, strengthened by the fusing effect of the Great War, take their old meaning from these vestiges and even hides all

<sup>1</sup> For conditions in Bosnia, Herzegovina and Macedonia, see Emile de Laveleye, *La Péninsule des Balkans*, I. pp. 185 *et seq.*, II. pp. 212 *et seq.*, and my article in *Eastern Europe*, July 1921, "Agrarian Conditions in Jugoslavia."

## 88 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

their history. Thus lawyers now discuss whether the Swedish *torpare* are to be regarded as tenants who pay rent for their holdings in days of work or labourers whose wages partly consist of small holdings.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE TENANT FARMER

IN the last chapter mention was made of the tendency in the later Middle Ages and the subsequent period to commute the customary services of tenants for money payments, that is for the quit-rents which with the passage of time became insignificant. This process turned some customary tenants into small-holders whose security of tenure and slight obligations to their landlords made them, for practical purposes, landowners. There were other rent-paying tenants who had received grants of waste land on condition they brought it under cultivation and paid a rent for it. Such tenants were especially numerous in Italy, where, from the time of the Barbarian invasions onwards, the ravages of war made the reclaiming of abandoned land a frequent problem of landlordship. Where the grant was to the holder and his heirs in perpetuity, he too became, in practice, a landowner. Many of the holders of emphyteuses or perpetual leases, who are hardly distinguishable from the small owners, and of whom there are some thirty thousand in modern Italy, have had this origin. But there were also rent-paying tenants who were sharply differentiated from owners, since they held their lands not in perpetuity but for a term of years.



## 90 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

They were tenant farmers in the modern sense of the word.

Leases for limited terms were first important in the Middle Ages in the less humble ranks of rural society. There came to be a certain accumulation of manors in the possession of some members of the landlordly class, as the result of successions under the law of primogeniture, marriages with heiresses, and purchases. Thus there were plural landlords, and these frequently let the demesnes on which they did not live, rather than employed reeves to manage them. Matchmakers and purchasers alike saw to it that the manor a landlord acquired often marched with that he inherited; and consequently there was a merging of lesser in greater estates, and some of the farmed demesne lands lost the memory of their former dignity. Other demesnes, with or without the signorial rights appurtenant to them, were let by absentees who were desirous of a fixed income in cash and of adventure. The Crusades were a great cause of absenteeism and the farming of manors or of demesne lands throughout Western Europe; the wars between England and France were another.

In the later Middle Ages the further practice arose in Italy, France, Spain and England of letting the holdings of customary tenants which fell vacant. In France this use was first followed at the end of the thirteenth century, and rather later in England, and it was everywhere stimulated by the Black Death: the mortality among peasants caused many holdings to escheat to the lord, and often he chose to grant them on lease rather than to settle customary

tenants on them. Sometimes several small lots were laid together to form a sizeable farm. Virgin and derelict land was meanwhile let on what might be called improvement leases. Lessees were, like other tenants, subject to the banalities of the manor, that is they were obliged to use, paying due customary fees, the conveniences of which the landlord had the monopoly—the mill, bakehouse and brewery or winepress, on occasion the wine-shop. Lessees were subject to the restrictions which ensured the lord's good hunting, and they often had to do customary works on his demesne.<sup>1</sup> The degree to which they shared communal rights with customary tenants probably varied from place to place. They enjoyed greater social status than the customary tenants, were free of the taint of bondage which was everywhere resented by the descendants of the villeins.

The terms of leases were various. In France, in the late Middle Ages, they were granted for twenty-six, nineteen, fifteen, twelve, nine, seven or even one year.<sup>2</sup> A fifteenth-century survey of the lands of Durham Priory discovers holdings granted on lease for the tenant's life, for fifty and for ninety years.<sup>3</sup> The grantee or his heir frequently renewed a lease at its expiry, but sometimes at an increased rent. The land itself was security for the rent, so that the landlord's risk was slight.

A prominent Englishman has left a picture of a Leicestershire tenant-farmer's household on the eve of the social changes involved by the Reformation.

<sup>1</sup> Henri Sée, *op. cit.*, Book IV.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Feodarium Prioratus Dunelmensis* (Surtees Soc.).

My father was a yeoman and had no lands of his own (said Bishop Latimer, preaching before the king in 1549), only he had a farm of three or four pound a year at the uttermost and hereupon he tilled so much as kept half a dozen men. He had walk for a hundred sheep, and my mother milked thirty kine. He was able and did find the king a harness, with himself and his horse, while he came to the place that should receive the king's wages. I can remember that I buckled his horse when he went into Blackheath field.<sup>1</sup> He kept me to school, or else I had not been able to have preached before the king's majesty now. He married my sisters with five pound or twenty nobles apiece, so that he brought them up in goodness and fear of God. He kept hospitality for his poor neighbours, and some alms he gave to the poor. And all this he did of the said farm, where he that now hath it payeth sixteen pound by year or more, and is not able to do anything for his prince, for himself nor for his children, or give a cup of drink to the poor.

This sixteenth century was in England a time when landlords were eager to increase their cash revenue from their lands. The Statute of Liveries and Maintenance, that first of the Tudor centralising measures, forbade them to keep the retinues of armed men which hitherto had both strengthened their local power and varied their rural leisure. They had perforce to abandon the old chivalrous way of life to which large retinues were essential. Moreover, many of them had not inherited the tradition of chivalry. There were the Dick Whittingtons, the new rich who made fortunes in London in this and the last century, and who acquired manors from families ruined by the Wars of the Roses, and there were the Crown grantees who held the late property of the religious houses. Another

<sup>1</sup> This levy was to quell the Cornish rebellion of 1495.

change was the partial delocalisation of trade, as the result of the new great importance of foreign trade, of the dissolution of religious houses "by whose wealth and haunt" many provincial towns had been "chiefly fed and nourished,"<sup>1</sup> of the improved means of communication, and of the Tudor regulation of national trade which superseded the old local gild organisation. Some sixteenth-century writers exaggerate, representing a complete stagnation of provincial life, even at a distance from London, a concentration of all industry and trade in London, and this, of course, was far from being universally true. But it is plain that in the reign of Elizabeth there were already two classes of English landlords, those who had become used, for a good part of the year, from "all shires," to "fly and flock to this city, the younger sort of them to see and show vanity, and the elder to save the cost and charge of hospitality and house-keeping," and those who stayed at home all the year round "playing the farmers, graziers, brewers or such like, more than gentlemen were wont to do."<sup>2</sup>

Both classes were anxious to increase their incomes in money, and their favourite methods were those set forth by Sir Anthony Fitzherbert, in his *Treatise on Surveying* published in 1539. He advises "how to make a Township that is worth twenty mark a year worth twenty pound a year," and recommends in the first place that lands be inclosed; in the second, "let every lord by his copy of court roll or by his

<sup>1</sup> Stowe, *Survey of London* (ed. C. L. Kingsford), II. p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> Stowe, *op. cit.*, II. p. 212.

## 94 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

indenture to make a sufficient lease to every of their tenants, to have to him and to his wife and to his children so that it pass not three lives." It became the aim of stirring landlords to convert their customary tenants into leaseholders, thus assuring to themselves a fixed income in money which could be adjusted, in accordance with changed values, as leases expired.

In Italy, France and Spain there was over large areas a similar passage from customary tenure to a tenure for a limited term of which the important incident was rent. All over Western Europe the old system by which each manor supported itself by its own yield and labour, save for the exchanges enabled by local markets, had broken down. In Italy the thriving trade and industry of the towns and their complicated, interesting life—religious, political and intellectual—attracted the more educated class and made a need for liquid capital. This was true also of France and of Spain in a less degree. In the kingdom of Naples and in France the centralising policies of the rulers directly urbanised the landlords, with the consequence that they wanted money more than aught else. In Spain the colonial empire caused a demand for liquid capital, partly to pay the high taxes. Leasehold tenure had a later beginning and a less importance in Central Europe, and east of the Elbe it continued to be exceptional, or at least rare, down to the nineteenth century.

From the Middle Ages there have been two main systems by which lands have been let in Europe. In Scotland, England, Ireland, the Low Countries

and North and East France the tenant has paid a fixed annual rent, generally in money ; in South and West France, Italy and Spain he has more often rendered a determined share of his produce to his landlord. In other words, rents have been fixed and have usually been paid in money where the principal crops have been grain, where the capital which the landlord necessarily contributes has consisted only of the actual land and its buildings. But in the more southern European countries the most valuable part of the yield of a farm has always come from the vines, the olive-trees, the fruit-trees, the mulberry-trees which enable silkworm rearing ; and all these cannot be produced by the tenant, like a corn-growing farmer's seed, but are the landlord's property and ceded with the land. In these countries the landlord has been apt to participate in the risk and profits of farming very directly, in that his share of the income from a farm has been a fraction of the harvest, be this large or small. Most usually the produce has been divided in equal moieties between the landlord and the cultivator, so that the tenant under this system is called a *métayer* in France and a *mezzadro* in Italy. But, sometimes the landlord's share has been a third or even a less fraction, and the system of *métayage* has other variations. It has been applied in Europe only to small holdings while farms of every size have been let for rents. But outside Great Britain the former holdings of customary tenants have generally retained their identity, in spite of modifications of their tenure, save where *latifundia* have been formed.

## 96 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

In every age three conditions have been essential to successful leasehold farming. First, the farmer must have reasonable assurance that he will be suffered to enjoy the fruits of his labour on the land he holds, a condition which has often been respected by a tacit agreement, both on holdings ceded without written leases and on farms of which the leases have expired, but which have continued to be occupied by the same family from generation to generation.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the tenant must be assured that when finally he does quit his farm he will be compensated for the improvements he has wrought on it: this condition loses importance as the first is surely established, and conversely. Thirdly, the tenant's profit after he has paid his rent must provide himself and his household with necessities and luxuries on the standard current in his district and class.

"The tenants be so doubtful of their landlords," wrote Sir Anthony Fitzherbert of certain English properties, "that if they should marl and make their holdings much better, they fear lest they should be put out or make a great fine or else to pay more rent."<sup>2</sup>

The system he condemned, that under which a tenant has no assurance that the labour and capital he expends on his holding will profit himself rather than his landlord or successor, brings to the land a shifting class of tenants who are interested only in making the greatest possible profit in the shortest possible time, who have no interest in maintaining

<sup>1</sup> Many farms were thus held in France last century. See Comte de Gasperi, *Fermage*, p. 163.

<sup>2</sup> *Surveying*, ch. xxvii.

or increasing the value of the land. It was notoriously exemplified in the Highlands in the late eighteenth and earlier nineteenth century, when a crofter was liable to eviction at any year's end, without right to compensation for the money or labour he might have invested in his croft. In the Highlands these uneconomic conditions were ended by the Crofters' Holdings Act of 1886, which protected a crofter from eviction except for failure to observe the terms of his lease, and gave outgoing crofter tenants the right to compensation for improvements effected by themselves or the members of their families who had preceded them as tenants. The third condition of good leasehold farming, that the farmer do not pay an excessive rent, is absent when there is unchecked and excessive competition for vacant holdings. It was thus absent in the congested districts of the Highlands, when the crofters, crowded out of the land absorbed in grazing farms and deer-forests, were bidding against each other for available crofts. Hence the clause in the 1886 Act and the later legislation which limit the rents of crofts to sums fixed by a public authority.

Ireland, before the reform wrought by the laws of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, also exemplified the worst type of leasehold tenure. Except in some parts of Ulster, the peasants had all been reduced to rent-paying tenants who had no security of tenure: there were the small farmers who held from ten to twelve acres; there were the cottars who held a couple of acres and eked out a livelihood by working for wages for the large farmers



## 98 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

and the landlords ; and there were the con-acre men, also partially dependent on wages, to whom land was ceded in time to prepare it for the crop and who surrendered it immediately after the harvest. In the early nineteenth century Irish farms of more than fifty acres had been mostly laid to grass, so that the market for hired agricultural labour was narrow and precarious.

These Irish peasants, having no security of tenure, were without motive to improve their holdings. Of those who held bog or mountain land John Revans, Secretary to the Irish Poor Law Commission, wrote in 1837, that :

after years of incessant toil and privation they mostly succeed in bringing their little plots into tolerable cultivation.

But

the rent is raised to meet the increased value which they have given to the land, and they will still be left with a bare subsistence and be deprived even of the smallest share of what their own skill and industry has produced. There is no alternative ; they must either pay the increased rent or quit the soil which their industry has converted from a worthless waste to a state of fertility.

The acute competition for holdings, partly due to the absorption of large areas in grazing farms, forced rents far above their economic level.

As it may fairly be said of the Irish peasantry (John Revans wrote) that every family which has not sufficient land to yield its food has one or more of its members supported by begging, it will easily be conceived that every

endeavour is made by the peasantry to obtain small holdings, and that they are not influenced in their biddings by the fertility of the land, or by their ability to pay the rent, but solely by the offer which is most likely to gain them possession. They give up, in the shape of rent, the whole produce of the land with the exception of a sufficiency of potatoes for a subsistence ; but as this is rarely equal to the promised rent, they constantly have against them an increasing balance. In some cases, the largest quantity of produce which their holdings ever yielded, or which, under their system of tillage, they could in the most favourable seasons be made to yield, would not be equal to the rent bid ; consequently, if the peasant fulfilled his engagement with his landlord, which he is rarely able to accomplish, he would till the ground for nothing, and give his landlord a premium for being allowed to till it. On the sea-coast fishermen, and in the northern counties those who have looms, frequently pay more in rent than the market value of the whole produce of the land they hold. It might be supposed that they would be better without land under such circumstances. But fishing might fail during a week or two, and so might the demand for the produce of the loom, when, did they not possess the land on which their food is grown, they might starve. The full amount of the rent bid, however, is rarely paid. The peasant remains constantly in debt to his landlord ; his miserable possessions—the wretched clothing of himself and of his family, the two or three stools and the few pieces of crockery which his wretched hovel contains—would not, if sold, liquidate the standing and generally accumulating debt. The peasantry are mostly a year in arrear and their excuse for not paying more is destitution. Should the produce of the holding, in any year, be more than usually abundant, or should the peasant by any accident become possessed of any property, his comforts cannot be increased ; he cannot indulge in better food nor in a greater quantity of it. His furniture cannot be increased neither can his wife or children be better clothed. The acquisition must go to the person under whom he holds. The accidental addition will enable him to reduce his arrear of rent and thus to defer ejectment. But this must be the bound of his expectation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Evils of the State of Ireland.*

The system sometimes failed of its worst effects because landlords were kindly and sensible ; but the object of such landlords, who let for rents which left a comfortable subsistence to their tenants, was defeated when, as occasionally happened, these tenants sold their leases for a sum equal to the difference between their rent and that obtainable under unchecked competition. Moreover, good landlordship was rare in Ireland in proportion to the absenteeism which delivered many properties into the hands of agents. Good landlordship became rarer still after the famine of the 'forties, when many of the old landlords were ruined and were replaced by lawyers and distillers and London companies who ran their properties on the principle that their rights implied no duty but that of extracting an immediate income from land.

This same spendthrift system of managing land is gaining ground at the present time in Spain ; and it is there at its worst because of the practice by which urbanised landlords entrust their properties to contractors who have no motive to be more than mercenary. These persons have of late years replaced many agreements under which the peasantry previously held land by short-term leases. For a very uncertain tenure the peasant has to pay an extremely high rent, and at the expiry of his lease he receives no compensation for his improvements. It is on leases of this kind that the peasants of Mancia and Aragon hold their land, in the eastern part of the district on annual leases of this kind. In the Asturias the hereditary leases which once prevailed have been

superseded by short-term leases, generally for four and at most for six years. In the central and southern provinces, the district of the *latifundia*, the terms of leases constantly tend to diminish while rents rise. The bad system is an important cause of the under-cultivation of Spain and of the poverty, unemployment and emigration of the peasants.

On the whole, the *métayers* of Europe have enjoyed more security of tenure than the tenants who pay a money rent. Until modern times *métayers* have rarely had written agreements, and their purely traditional title has proved one of much stability. A great force of sentiment, his own and that of his neighbours, strengthens the position of a man who has held his land time out of mind. A written title is the material of lawyers, those who drew it up, faultily or otherwise, and those who interpret it. It is far more easily overthrown than a purely customary title. Perhaps also the lasting nature of the *métayer's* usual plantations—the ancient vines, the secular olive-groves and mulberry trees—has made for a general permanency. The *métayer* is attached not only to his land, but to the things which grow on it, as no man can be to fleeting crops of corn. At all events, the *métayers* of France, Italy, Spain and Portugal, have been little disturbed in their occupancy of the land, so that they have often held their small farms for more generations than their landlords. Their consequent great conservatism has influenced their farming, and thus has armed their critics of whom some allege that its excess out-balances their unchallengeable industry and specialised skill. It

## 102 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

has also influenced them as men and as citizens, and won them the peculiar hatred of revolutionaries. The *métayers* with the small owners have preserved the family institutions which are still at the basis of Continental rural society.

We have a picture, dating from the last years of the eighteenth century, of *métayage* in Tuscany, a country in which this system of landholding is typical. The ancient feudal banalities had come at this date to be represented by a poll-tax of one lira, called mill-money, payable by the *métayers* to the government of the duchy. All other direct taxes fell on the landlord. Customary works had been reduced to an obligation to wash some or all of the landlord's linen at his biennial wash, for which he furnished the necessary soap. As for the farming capital, the landlord gave the land with the buildings and the vines and other trees; when vines were planted anew, he supplied poles for them; he paid the whole cost of bringing new land under cultivation and making improvements and repairs; he made all purchases of live-stock; and he paid half the price of the bought manure and seed. The *métayer* paid the other half of the price of such manure and seed, and found the wood for vine-props after these had been supplied for the first time; and he did all the work of tilling the holding. The produce of the several crops, and of the live-stock except the poultry, was divided, after the needs of the *métayer* and his household had been met, into two halves, of which one was kept by the *métayer* and the other went to the landlord or was sold by the *métayer* on his behalf.

The *métayer* also paid a fixed rent of a certain number of eggs, chickens and capons, and sometimes a couple of baskets of grapes. As to the productivity of *métairies* of this kind, we have the accounts of one which measured about five acres, and which produced mostly wine, but also olive-oil, figs, onions and other vegetables, fruit, a little grain and silk. On this small farm a peasant lived for thirty years and brought up a family of five sons and two daughters, and it yielded the landlord, in 1797, an income in money at the rate of £3 18s. an acre. It was customary for landlords to make advances to the tenants after bad seasons, so that one out of ten of them was in his landlord's debt. Yet, although leases were terminable at a year's notice, evictions were rare.<sup>1</sup> These Tuscan *métairies* give average examples of the working of the system in good conditions. They may be compared with the *caserias* of the Gascon provinces of Spain, which are still regulated by a custom centuries old. The holder renders to the landlord a small annual rent in kind—a pair of fowls or a dozen eggs—as well as half his surplus of produce after he has provided for the needs of his own household. If he keeps cows he supplies, at the current market price, all the milk the landlord wants. If he breeds stock, the landlord provides the animals needed for this purpose and receives half the price which the young animals fetch. Another variation of *métayage* is found on the *masoverias* of Catalonia, where the landlord or *mos* retains certain rooms in

<sup>1</sup> Simonde de Sismondi, *Tableau de l'agriculture toscane*, Geneva, 1801.

## 104 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

the house ceded to the *masover* or tenant. Every district in which this system of landholding is followed presents its own peculiarities.

From the account of Tuscan *métairies* we learn that, in 1800 and before that date, there were landlords who, for the sake of a fixed income in ready money, let these holdings for money rents when they fell vacant, and similar conversions of *métairies* into *fermages* took place in France in the nineteenth century. *Métayage* should involve a close partnership in farming between the landlord and the tenant, and the best *métairies* of Southern France and Italy have owed much to the superintendence of their landlords who often have been domiciled in the nearest towns, in these countries so dotted with ancient towns. When, as has often happened on the continent of Europe, the landlord has escaped trouble by delegating his duties to an agent or contractor, *métayage* has been apt to deteriorate. When he has exchanged his share of produce for a money rent, he has rid himself not only of trouble, but also of responsibility and risk which have been shifted to the tenant. The practice was an offence to the best public opinion of last century, when treatises were published in France and Italy to expound a landlord's duties and exhort him against neglect of them and in particular against absenteeism.<sup>1</sup> Its evil possibilities have been illustrated in Spain and elsewhere.

<sup>1</sup> Comte de Gasperrin, *Métayage*; Jules Rieffel, *Manuel du métayage*; Stefano Jacini, *La proprietà fondiaria e le popolazioni agricole in Lombardia*.

Yet at the present time this conversion of *métairies* into *fermages* is actually an object of desire to the *métayers* of some districts. In North and Central Italy the *métayers* have, since the Great War, become a class with grievances. They have formed trade unions, and these have drawn up model leases in *métayage* which many landlords have been driven to accept, so that the old customary relation between landlord and tenant has been exchanged for a contractual relation. In Tuscany, the two most advanced political parties are bidding for the support of the *métayers*, the Reds or Socialists, whose final aim is land nationalisation, and the Whites, otherwise the Popular or Catholic Party, who are distributivists. In August 1920, the Red organisation, no true friend to permanent smallholders, agreed with the Tuscan Landlords' Association on a model lease in *métayage*, of which a principal clause gives the *métayer* security of tenure for three years. But this does not satisfy the Whites. They demand that landlords be deprived of any right to evict tenants, that a tenant have a right of pre-emption whenever his holding comes into the market, and that he render to his landlord not a share of produce but a fixed rent in money. They wish, in fact, to make him a perpetual leaseholder who may, on occasion, become a small owner. In September 1920 the Whites presented to the landlords various leases which embodied these principles and which were rejected, whereupon many *métayers* refused to surrender to their landlords the customary half share of wine and olives and even sold cattle on their own account.

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This dispute makes clear that at the present day some *métayers* do not only, like all tenant farmers at all times, desire security of tenure and fair rents, but that they also resent that control of farming which the landlord of every *métairie* is able to exercise.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE SMALL OWNER

SERVILE tenure was finally abolished in France by two laws of 1789. The first, passed by the National Assembly on the 11th of August, put an end to all rights touching personal bondage, declared all other rents, quit-rents and perpetual rents to be compulsorily redeemable, and deprived the landlords of any jurisdictional rights they might retain, of their exclusive right to have a dovecote, their right to shoot and have a free warren on their tenants' land, and the exemption of their demesnes from taxation. It also abolished tithes; and it declared all persons, without distinction of rank, to be admissible to every office and employment. This law was complemented by that of the 28th of September, which first proclaimed the whole territory of France to be "free as are the persons who inhabit it," so that "no territorial property may be subjected to other usages than those established or recognised by law, or to other sacrifices than those necessary to the common weal." Secondly, it allowed landowners "to change at pleasure the cultivation and farming of their lands, to store their harvests at pleasure and to dispose of the produce of their properties, without prejudice

to the rights of others and in conformity with the law."

Thus all the land of France which was not held on lease became the absolute property of its holders, saving that the state retained its right to tax and legislate. But while the Revolution affected the terms on which French peasants held, it did not importantly increase the area in their tenure. The customary services and many customary rents were finally forfeited without compensation, and slight though their value mostly was, its loss fell heavily on many poor landlords.<sup>1</sup> From 20,000 to 25,000 nobles, and about 60,000 religious were deprived of the land they held, but it was not split up among the peasants, who lacked the capital or enterprise necessary to acquire it. It was bought by adventurous burghers, or it returned to its former holders when the political reversal occurred. The peasants were like Joseph Casimir Fouan, descendant of serfs of the house of Rogne-Bouqueval, in Zola's *La Terre*.

In '93 Joseph Casimir was twenty-seven years old, and on the day on which what remained of the demesne was declared the property of the nation he burnt to acquire some hectares of it. The ruined and indebted Rogne-Bouquevals, having let the last tower of the château crumble away, had long since abandoned to their creditors the rents of La Borderie and three-quarters of its fields were lying fallow. There was in particular a large piece of land beside one of the peasant's parcels which he coveted with the furious desire of his race. But the harvests were bad; he had, in an old pot behind his oven, barely a hundred crowns of savings. Moreover, if, for one moment, he did think of

<sup>1</sup> See L. G. L. Guilhaud de Lavergne, *Economie rurale de la France depuis 1789*.

borrowing from the Cloyes money-lender, an uneasy prudence made him change his mind. He was afraid of these properties of the nobles. How could one know that they would not be taken back one day? And so, torn between his desire and his distrust, he had the heartbreak of seeing, at the auction, La Borderie bought piece by piece, at a fifth of its value, by a burgher of Chateaudun, Isidore Hourdequin, formerly a salt-tax official.

The French agrarian revolution realised two principles. It centralised all rights over a man's property and over his personal liberty in the state, put an end to the purely local and the ecclesiastical limitations thereof, and in this it was the culmination of the policy which had been pursued by the French monarchy since the fifteenth century. Secondly, it realised the new and revolutionary principle that "all men are born equal" in that it destroyed the caste organisation of society which had been built up on a territorial basis with the civilisation of Barbarian Europe. The peasant, the burgher and the noble were, as landholders, now made equal before the law.

No movement of the French Revolution had a more overt and widespread influence. Before the end of the nineteenth century it had overrun all Europe outside the Turkish Empire. Its progress was not more rapid in countries with free institutions than in others, for it was due less to respect for the rights of man discovered in France, than to the seductiveness of centralisation, which has ever become more attractive as increased means of communication have made it more feasible, and to the new and favourite economic theory of the nineteenth century, that

## 110 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

of free trade. The stability of customary tenure of land was abhorrent to the new economists, as were all other limitations of the power to alienate—entails, and the permanent classification of land as noble, burgher, peasant or Church land. As far as possible these economists wished to secure a free circulation of rights of property in land.

Frederick the Great began the second great agrarian revolution in Europe by an edict of 1807 which shows that his advisers believed in Adam Smith as well as in the rights of man.

It is not only conformable to the everlasting dictates of justice, but also to the principles of a sound national economy, to remove all hindrances in the way of an individual's attaining to that measure of wellbeing to which his capacities may enable him to attain,

ran some phrases of its preamble. The edict, by its final clauses, abolished the relation of vassal to overlord; from Martinmas 1810, there were to be "none but freemen in our dominions." But its first ten clauses were taken up with facilitating conveyances. Every inhabitant of the kingdom was made free to acquire in it land of every description—the noble, burgher and peasant land; the burgher, land which might or might not be noble. All landowners might sell their land, piecemeal or in block. Co-owners might divide their property. Landowners might grant leases of entailed and other land. They might cut off entails with the consent of their families. They might extinguish or consolidate peasant holdings which were not hereditary. Moreover, burgher and

peasant callings were thrown open to nobles, and it was declared that a burgher might become a peasant or a peasant a burgher. This decree and one issued in 1811 also provided for the division of common lands. Another decree of 1811 ordered that within two years landlords and tenants should come to an agreement regarding the abrogation of their mutual rights and duties.

In 1816 the great landlords procured a reactionary decree which again subjected the small peasants, that is all those who did not own a yoke of oxen, to the obligation to work on the demesnes. These were the smallholders who would, even if freed, have had to earn wages in order to make a livelihood. All the self-sufficient peasant farmers were left fully independent owners of their land; and in 1850 a new law conferred this status on the small peasants also.

Meanwhile the other German States had followed Prussia's lead—Bavaria in 1808 and 1818, Nassau in 1812, Waldeck in 1814, Wurtemberg in 1817, Baden in 1818, Hesse-Darmstadt and the two Mecklenburgs in 1820, Coburg-Gotha in 1821, the Electorate of Hesse in 1831.<sup>1</sup>

In Spain, a law of 1811 incorporated in the nation all jurisdictional lordships, and abolished the relation of vassal to lord and all rents and services except those which were the outcome of free contracts.

<sup>1</sup> For detailed studies of peasant emancipation in Germany, see Theodor von der Goltz, *Geschichte der deutschen Landwirtschaft*, II. pp. 132-64, and *Systems of Land Tenure* (Cobden Club), "The Agrarian Legislation of Prussia during the Present Century," by R. B. D. Morier.

## 112 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

It also did away with all exclusive, private and prohibitive privileges of landlordly origin, such as hunting and fishing rights, the right to have a mill and bakehouse and rights in waters and forests, all of which were given to the villages, generally to hold in common.<sup>1</sup>

In Italy the system of *métayage* had, in practice, made an end to servile tenure where it had been introduced. For the rest, feudal privileges were defined and diminished and classes were to some extent equalised in the eighteenth century by Victor Amadeus II in Piedmont, Charles Emmanuel III in Savoy, Francis and Leopold of Lorraine in Tuscany, Charles III and Ferdinand of Bourbon in the Kingdom of Naples and the Marchese di Villamarini in Sicily. In 1797 banalities were abolished in Piedmont, and in 1806 the landlords of Naples were deprived of their subsisting rights to the customary work of their tenants. There was throughout Italy a tendency to allow servile conditions of land tenure to lapse. As part of the reaction against democracy which followed the events of 1814, some landlords, however, resumed old rights and privileges, and exercised them in certain districts of South Italy through most of the nineteenth century. But in the States of the Church Pius VII in 1816 did away with all landlordly rights, privileges and monopolies, and in 1851 servile tenure was definitely abolished in Piedmont by statute.

<sup>1</sup> <sup>1</sup> For discussion of this reform, see Francisco de Cardenas, *Ensayo sobre la Historia de la Propiedad Territorial en España*, Vol. II. pp. 1 *et seq.*

In the countries of the Austro-Hungarian Empire the old landlordly rights had a real existence until the Revolution of 1848, but were ended by a law of that year.<sup>1</sup>

By the middle of the nineteenth century servile tenure of land had likewise been abolished or had become obsolete in the smaller countries of Western Europe—Portugal, Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, the Scandinavian countries. The liberating movement spread eastwards. In 1861 the Russian serfs were emancipated; in 1864 the Roumanian peasants were freed from very onerous obligations and became freeholders; Montenegro, Old Serbia, Old Bulgaria and Greece were left without landlords as they drove their Turkish rulers southwards. When the twentieth century opened, servile tenants were found in all Europe only in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where Turkish influence was still strong, and in Macedonia whence the Turks had not yet been expelled.

The result was that a large part of the area of Europe came to be held by small independent and land-owning farmers who, with the *métayers* and the less numerous rent-paying farmers, form the great peasant class.

At the present time 60 per cent. of the arable and meadow land of France is divided into holdings of less than a hundred acres. In Italy small cultivating landowners form the majority of the agricultural population in Piedmont, Liguria, Venetia,

<sup>1</sup> See Karl Grünberg, *Die Grundentlastung* (published as chap. i. of Vol. I of *Geschichte der oesterreichischen Land und Forstwirtschaft und ihrer Industrien 1848-98*, and *Die Bauernbefreiung in Böhmen, Mähren und Schlesien*, pp. 375-405.



## 114 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

and the Abruzzi and Molise, and *métayers* in Lombardy. Emilia, Tuscany, Marcia and Umbria. In all the districts of Italy in which small owners predominate *métayers* are also numerous, and conversely ; and small owners and *métayers* hold much land even in Latium and the south, where they are outnumbered by landless day-labourers. There are, in particular, many peasant owners in Campania. In Spain almost the whole north-east is cultivated by small holders, 97 per cent. of the owners tilling their land in Catalonia. In Portugal there is a similar large predominance of peasant farmers except in the country longest held by the Moors. In Germany peasant holdings cover most of the south and west, varying from the sizeable farms of some fifty to a hundred acres which are typical of Bavaria, to the very small holdings especially numerous in the Rhineland. It is calculated that peasant holdings on which no hired labour is employed occupy about a quarter and the larger peasant farms slightly more than a half of the total area of the country. Less than a quarter of the whole area is taken up by the large properties, but these in the old Prussian kingdom overshadow the peasant farms, and employ and mainly support many peasants who hold freely only the plots around their cottages. In Austria peasant farmers greatly predominate, although in Lower Austria there are some large properties, cultivated as units. In Czecho-Slovakia about 60 per cent. of the whole area was held, even before the recent reform, in farms of less than fifty hectares. In Croatia and Slavonia numerous peasant holdings similarly existed side-by-side with com-

paratively few large estates. In Hungary about half the total area was taken up by holdings of less than a hundred acres. In Poland they covered about 60 per cent. of the total area and more than 70 per cent. of the cultivated area. In Roumania, until the other day, a small nucleus of large land-owners was surrounded by a multitude of peasant proprietors, whose holdings were often very small and covered altogether more than 50 per cent. of the total area. Serbia, Montenegro and Bulgaria have only peasant owners. Ireland, the Scottish Highlands and all the other lesser countries of Europe are mainly farmed by peasant tenants and owners.

The small owners are to be divided into those whose land suffices to maintain them and their families and those who must find for themselves an additional means of support. The self-sufficing farms are themselves graded, from the large number in all peasant countries wholly tilled by the holder and the members of his family, through those which employ a little paid labour in busy seasons, to those, numerous in France and Central Europe, on which some labour is permanently hired. Even on a farm of some forty or fifty acres there is often a maidservant who helps the housewife in her domestic and outdoor duties, and on larger farms the wage-earning element is naturally more important. The area which can keep a man and his family varies with soil and climate, kinds of farming, the accessibility of markets, the skill of the farmers and their knowledge of agriculture, the capital available for them, the more or less industrious habits of peoples, and their greater

## 116 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

and smaller demand for necessities and luxuries. It is, for instance, smaller in the market-gardening districts of France and Holland and in North Italy, than in Serbia where agriculture is primitive, Jutland where the soil is particularly light, and England where the weather is uncertain and the standard of living unusually high. Further, this minimum area of the farm which keeps a household has been modified by some events of history.

Down to modern times the small peasant was largely dependent on the live-stock which he was able to pasture on waste-land, in woods, and sometimes on fallowland and stubble. But in the eighteenth century an advance in agricultural science made the open fields and commons of Europe an offence to economists, and the commons a desirable investment for capital. In Germany many open fields were inclosed, and in France, Germany and Italy many commons were inclosed and divided in this and the next century. The result was that many small peasants had to give up keeping cows, pigs, goats, sheep, geese and donkeys, and at the same time they were robbed of their free supply of turf and wood for fuel. They had, in consequence, to find new work in order to eke out the yield of their cultivated plots.

Modern history has also worsened the smallholder's position in that it has weakened the communal life of villages. All that part of peasant economy which was collective—not only the use of pasturages, but also the employment of herds, some joint cultivation, the joint use and upkeep of mills, bakehouses and

winepresses—has suffered by the emancipation of servile tenants which left each peasant at the mercy of the individualistic tendencies of the age. But although communal village life has vanished from England and left few traces in France, its vestiges remain in other countries. And to some extent it has been continued or the gap it left has been supplied by the co-operative movement to which a special chapter of this book is devoted.

Other events of history have strengthened the small-holder, in particular those which have made possible new kinds of cultivation suited to his methods. Thus the Saracen invaders of Southern Europe brought with them silkworms, which need the minute care only a small farmer and the members of his family can give. For the sake of silkworm rearing many mulberry trees were planted, first on the lands of Saracen settlement—silks of Saracen pattern were being made in Sicily and Apulia in the first half of the twelfth century ; then further north in Italy, to feed the manufactures of Florence, Milan, Genoa and Venice ; then in France. There was silk weaving in Tours in 1480, and Francis I, some forty years later, introduced silkworm rearing into the Rhone Valley, but the industry was not established over large areas in France until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when it was fostered by royal edicts and premiums were given for the plantation of mulberry trees. Mulberry trees became and have remained an important resource of Italian and French peasants. The Arab race also has the credit of bringing into Europe a crop which became an important part of

the food-supply of peasants. The Moorish conquerors are believed to have introduced maize into Spain in the thirteenth century, and maize bread and the maize porridge called *polenta* are still one of the chief peasant foods of Spain, Portugal and Italy. Elsewhere, the area which could support a peasant family was reduced by potato-growing, which began in Spain, Italy, Belgium and Ireland in the sixteenth century and afterwards spread to Scotland, England and France. As maize became the chief article of the diet of many Spanish and Italian peasants, so potatoes became that of the peasants of Ireland, the Scottish Highlands and parts of France and Belgium, and the potato blights of the 'forties were therefore catastrophic, and in Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland threw the whole peasantry economy out of gear.

The size of the farm which fully supports a peasant household has also varied with the extent to which holdings have been divided into separate parcels. In the countries in which open-field cultivation was practised in historical times, a man's holding was made up of strips in the several arable fields, and where the patriarchal clan cultivation did not subsist, and there was no custom which caused a man's holding to pass to one only of his sons, it was divided among them at his death, each of them usually receiving a plot in each of his fields. These two circumstances caused many small holdings to be made up of scattered pieces of ground. The old open-field system became unpopular or even impractical when in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

cultivation was intensified and methods of cultivation were individualised. Subdivision as the result of inheritance increased after the emancipation of servile tenants had ended the landlord's control of alienations, marriages and successions, and it has also increased as modern life has weakened the family institutions which make clan cultivation possible. Thus it has happened that many have not found means of sustenance on their holdings, not because these have been too small, but because they have consisted of scattered plots of ground. In Germany, Scandinavia and Switzerland there was, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a movement so to re-arrange the land of villages, by exchanging parcels, as to make each holding as far as possible self-contained. This process, which has made many peasant farms much more productive than they were previously, was most recently carried out on a large scale in Russia including Russian Poland, from 1907 to 1914,<sup>1</sup> where, however, it has been checked or cancelled by the agrarian revolution. In several parts of Europe there are still holdings which are subdivided to a ruinous degree.

Both in France and in Austria much remains to be done for the adequate consolidation of peasant farms.<sup>2</sup> In the Cantabrian provinces of Spain there are holdings of from one hundred and thirty to four

<sup>1</sup> *International Review of Agricultural Economics* (International Institute of Agriculture, Rome), December 1916 and February 1917.

<sup>2</sup> See *Ibid.* May 1916; C. Chauveau, *La France agricole et la guerre*, pp. 13-40; Compère-Morel, *Le socialisme agraire*, pp. 25-29; and, for Austria, Otto Bauer, "Leitsätze zur Agrarpolitik," in *Freiheit* (Berlin), July 29, 1921.

## 120 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

hundred and thirty square yards in which there are enclaves of seven, five and even two and a half square yards. In the district of Santa Maria de Ordax every farmer owns and farms from eighty to one hundred and twenty plots which have an aggregate area of sixteen or seventeen acres and are scattered within a radius of three miles. In the district of Vigo there are many isolated parcels which measure no more than thirty-five, twenty-five or even twelve square yards, and two continuous acres in the tenure of one man are considered very large.<sup>1</sup>

Small holdings have also fallen below the point at which they suffice to support a family when part of their normal yield has been diverted from such object. This has sometimes been effected by the owner when he has mortgaged his land or its crops too heavily, or when he has let it, wholly or partially, so that it has been burdened with rent. In some parts of Spain, peasant holdings have been let and then sublet to the second, third and fourth degree and even beyond this, to the great impoverishment of their occupiers. Similarly, subletting was a cause of the great poverty of Irish tenant farmers.

Wherever there are agricultural holdings of an area inadequate to the support of a household, there must be subsidiary outlets for the labour of the peasants. Along the coasts and on the islands of Europe the smallholders are fishermen; in populous districts they are sometimes traders. In every

<sup>1</sup> *International Review of Agricultural Economics*, May and July, 1916.

country of Europe they have practised handicrafts until recently, and even now they or their womenfolk still knit, spin, weave, make lace, embroider, plait straw, make baskets and pots, work wood and leather. Even in the industrialised countries these rural industries are not yet quite extinct. But, more and more, modern society takes this work from the peasants to give it to the factories, as it took some of their commons to give them to the capitalist farmers, and as it is taking their fishing to give it to the trawling companies. So the small peasants must eke out a livelihood by working for wages, nearly always as agricultural labourers.

There has been and is a tendency to squeeze them out of existence by engrossing their holdings in larger farms. In the industrialised countries this has been in part caused or facilitated by the rural exodus. In France, in particular, holdings have been left vacant by peasants attracted by urban wages and delights, and have afterwards been absorbed in large farms. But in France, as in Belgium and Hungary, even more in North-East Germany and most of all in England, the disappearance of peasant holdings has also been deliberately contrived in order to make way for high farming. The eighteenth century discovered that large-scale farming could be a profitable investment. Inclosures, drainage, the use of machinery, of chemical manures: all these in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries widened the possibilities of farming for the capitalist. The introduction of sugar beets into Northern Europe helped not the peasant, like the earlier introductions



## 122 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

of silkworms, maize and potatoes, but the large farmer. So did the progress of scientific stock-breeding, and the attendant introduction of root-crops, clover and artificial grasses. The peasant has found himself faced with an enemy better equipped than his accustomed adversary, the *latifundisto*, for the capitalist farmer, who is a lavish producer of food stuffs, does no obvious injury to the common weal and therefore has to fear little general opposition.

## CHAPTER VIII

### WHAT HAPPENED IN ENGLAND

To some extent every country, like every province and every village, has had a special history, and England's history for the first sixteen centuries or so of our era had very interesting particularities. Yet it was, on the whole, on a line with that of other important European countries. Only in one respect was England really exceptional, and that was in her possession of an extraordinary line of kings. They were extraordinary, in the first place, in that most of them, like their later successors, were foreigners, of families which originated in Normandy, Blois, Anjou and Wales, and the sons of foreign mothers. Secondly, several of them were statesmen of quite the first rank, and many of these—the more important—had towards England a detached foreigner's attitude. The English kings lacked the bias born of intimacy, and this made for order and decision. England was endowed with shrewdly planned political institutions. In so far as they affected land tenure, they were particular in the uniformity they produced all over the country and in the binding force they gave to the written word. A foreign king, William I, made the uniformity when he caused all mesne landlords to swear allegiance not

to their immediate overlords, but directly to himself, their ultimate overlord. He also began the quite exceptional practice of recording all landholders when he ordered that the Domesday Survey should be drawn up; and he simultaneously raised record to supremacy over custom, since a man entered in the Domesday Book as tenant of a holding had a far stronger title to it than he whose ancestors might have held it from time immemorial, perhaps the Englishman whom a Norman had ousted. Edward I continued this work of the Conqueror by his statute "*Quia Emptores*," which made it necessary to procure a royal license for alienations, and as a result of which there has been public record of every conveyance of rights in land in England from the thirteenth century to this day. Both the recording habit, which fostered order rather than justice, and the tendency to uniformity affected the English peasants. In legal and in current phraseology they came to hold their land, all over England, not by custom, as on the Continent, but by the record of that custom, entered in the rolls of the manorial land court which they were obliged to attend as tenants of a manor. On these rolls their customary rights and duties and the passage of their holding from tenant to tenant were entered. It was said that they held by "*copy of court roll*," and in course of time they were known as copyhold tenants or copyholders.

Saving that their title was a written one, their position does not seem to have been widely different from that of customary tenants elsewhere. They paid quit-rents, which the change in the value of

money made insignificant after the close of the Middle Ages, and they also owed to their landlords certain services which had, in the beginning of the eighteenth century, lapsed past the point at which they still remained in Continental countries, but which had not then fallen into full desuetude. Edward Lawrence, in a treatise published in 1727, enumerates the customary services which a diligent steward would find entered upon the "ancientist court rolls" as due from copyholders and would make it his business to exact.

(1) It is customary in most Manors for the Tenants to send their Teams to lead home the Hay and Corn which comes off the Demesne Lands commonly kept in hand for the use of the Lord of the Manor, when he comes in the Summer to live among his Tenants. (2) It is also customary for the Tenants to lead Timber and Stone, etc., whenever there is occasion for building or repairs. (3) It is also a good-natur'd Custom for each Tenant to send every year, during their Lord's Residence, a Present of two fat Capons or Turkeys, or else any other present of Fish or Fowl, such as the Country produceth, of the like value. (4) It is common for each Tenant to keep a couple of Hounds or Setting-Dogs for the use of the Lord when he comes down, for his diversion.<sup>1</sup>

From the sixteenth, and much more from the beginning of the eighteenth century onwards, England had a history which was special in many and in important aspects. The combined effect of the enterprise of Christopher Columbus and the later English adventurers and of geography made possible a trade which found its necessary supplies in an industry first stimulated by Protestant refugees from

<sup>1</sup> *The Duty of a Steward to his Lord*, Art. XXIII.

## 126 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

France and the Low Countries. Exporting and importing were facilitated by the delocalisation and centralisation of English trade mentioned in an earlier chapter. Trade was yet further delocalised and centralised by the new roads and the canals of the eighteenth century, the railways of the nineteenth century. New markets opened up overseas as the British Empire expanded. And industry grew with the export trade, and was able to feed it, while the country could absorb the enormous imports. This increase of industry and purchasing power was due, first, to the fact that from the defeat of the Armada until the advent of the German airmen, England was attacked or invaded only by the Scots, the armies which crossed the Tweed in 1640 and 1648 and the heroic and pathetic army of Prince Charles Edward, and she spent less of her manhood and treasure on wars than the other countries of West and Central Europe. Moreover, in the nineteenth century England's great mineral riches enabled a fantastic development of industry.

‡ The economic result was that vast wealth accrued to England. And it happened that very much of it was invested in the land. This is at the root of the essential difference between the modern history of landholding in England and in every other country of Europe: in England agriculture has been made almost wholly a capitalist industry; in all other countries it is still mainly controlled and its means of production are chiefly owned by small producers. From about the end of the seventeenth century the agrarian history of England became exceptional.

It has sometimes been said that the English landlordly class has always been less exclusive than that of other nations, and generally France is adduced as an example of a country which had a hard-bound caste of landlords. But it is not true that there was an entirely rigid caste system in Europe : in England, as in France and elsewhere, the privileges of gentrice were jealously guarded, but in France, as in England and Italy, probably more than in Spain and Germany, the gentle-born were recruited throughout the Middle Ages and afterwards from the fortunate of the burgher class. There were special events of modern English history, rather than peculiarities of English institutions or the English character, which were misfortunes to the old landlords and put luck in the way of the burghers. The Wars of the Roses, the sequestration of the property of the religious, the Civil War after which the loyalist landlords had, to their great impoverishment, to compound with the Government before their estates were restored to them, the rewards gained by the Whig revolutionaries : it was all these which gave exceptional fluidity to the lordship of English land. The fortunes made by trade and industry were invested in the land when the new rich bought properties, as many of them did, or when, as also happened often, they dowered their daughters who married landlords. Fortunes were attracted to the land because of a demand for agricultural produce from the growing industrial and mercantile population, a demand so great that it made landed property a good investment. In 1696 the population of England and

## 128 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

Wales is said to have been five and a half millions,<sup>1</sup> in 1760 between six and seven millions; in 1801 it was nearly nine millions; in 1811 more than ten millions; in 1851 nearly eighteen millions; in 1901 thirty-two and a half millions. Until the Corn Laws were repealed in 1846 and while sea transport was prohibitively costly, all this population was fed mainly by the produce of English farming, which also, for a great part of the eighteenth century, grew large quantities of wheat for export.

In 1696 nearly four-fifths of the English were still country folk, and the nation was self-supporting so long as the farmers produced quite a small surplus beyond their own needs. It had been the ideal of mediæval statesmen that the land should breed a virtuous and contented peasantry who sold their surplus—especially the food for the townspeople, and the fleeces for export—without fraud and for just prices. About this time a new ideal was adopted, namely, "the progress of agriculture, which may be summed up in increasing the yield and lowering the cost of production."<sup>2</sup> The rapid expansion of trade had bred the conception that there is no limit to possible markets, and therefore that over-production was impossible.

The initiative was taken by the landlords who alone had the necessary capital and knowledge. The new ideal, which was theirs, was distinct from that of the earlier *latifundisti* and extortionate landlords,

<sup>1</sup> Gregory King, *Natural and Political Observations and Conclusions upon the State and Condition of England* 1696, § III.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Ernle, *English Farming Past and Present*, p. 211.

whose aim it was to increase not the whole yield of the land, which indeed they nearly always diminished, but only their own share of its yield. Yet the old *latifundisti* and the new capitalist landlords were alike in that they reached their end at the expense of the peasants. Both kinds of landlords centralised the control of the land they held: the old *latifundisti* did it by dispensing with the small tenants; the capitalist landlords either by expelling the small tenants or by changing their status from that of tenants to that of wage-earners.

The process followed was a continuance and acceleration of that inclosure of commons and open fields, conversion of copyhold into leasehold lands and eviction of smallholders which has already been described. As before, copyholders in whose tenure a flaw could be found were evicted, as were small lessees when their leases fell in. The free tenants, whom Chaucer paints in his *Frankleyn*, and who were important in England, were also attacked. They corresponded to the Continental small landlords numerous in Brittany and some other parts of France, and they held their lands not by servile tenure but by slight rents, for which military or other honourable service had been commuted, and by suit at the court of the manor of which they were tenants. It became an object of great landlords to engross the lands of these freeholders, by making use of every possible opportunity to buy them, and the smallest manors were similarly acquired, together with copyholds which by their area ranked with freeholds.



The legal methods used are expounded by Edward Lawrence. "A steward should not forget," he writes, "to make the best Enquiry into the disposition of any of the Freeholders within or near any of his Lord's Manors, to sell their Lands, that he may use his best Endeavours to purchase them at as reasonable a price as may be for his Lord's Advantage and Convenience"; and he exhorts the steward, when inclosures are made, "never to parcel out lands to small Freeholders." Further, "I would advise all Noblemen and Gentlemen, whose Tenants hold their Lands by Copy of Court-Roll for three Lives, not to let them renew, except they will agree to deliver up their Copy, in order to alter the Tenure, by converting it to Leasehold on Lives." But the new leaseholders were apt to find their second state worse than their first, for "a Steward, as much as in him lieth, and without Oppression, should endeavour to lay all the small Farms let to poor indigent People, to the great ones. . . . As for the Farms of Eight or Ten pounds per annum, I have always found it to be of little moment to lease such, because the Tenants that rent them are generally poor and necessitous: Wherefore the best way to deal with them, when they do not perform or transgress their duty, is, first, to reprove them for not observing good Rules, and when there is little hopes of their doing better, to get rid of them as soon as possible, always supposing that some care be taken of their Families, in setting them to work in such ways which they better understand." <sup>1</sup> Thus were smallholders changed to hired

<sup>1</sup> *The Duty of a Steward to his Lord*, 1727.

labourers. That perpetual copyholders often fared no better than those whose tenure was for three lives, is evident from the *Spectator* who in 1714 satirized the proceedings in "the manors of East and West Enborne" as they affected "the most frail and slippery tenure of any in England." "A strict inquisition having been made into the right of the tenants to their several estates, by a crafty old steward, he found that many of the lands of the manor were . . . forfeited to the lord."<sup>1</sup> The copyholders whose major source of income was their earnings on the large farms were also affected by the fall in wages at the end of the eighteenth century and were often driven to sell or to mortgage their holdings.

In the late eighteenth and the earlier nineteenth century the general economic changes weakened the freeholders and disposed or obliged many of them to sell their farms. The cost of inclosures, and of the improvements which freeholders must make if they would keep pace with the tenant-farmers, sometimes drove them to sell. They were also embarrassed by the obligation to pay poor-rates, for which, if they farmed their lands only with the help of the members of their families, they received no return, and poor-rates rose high as the class of landless labourers increased. Moreover, according to Sir Arthur Ashby, some freeholders sold out voluntarily, because they wished to invest in other industries than agriculture or because they wished to become tenant farmers, sinking their capital in stock rather

<sup>1</sup> No. 623, November 22, 1714.

## 182 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

than in land.<sup>1</sup> A pamphlet published in 1795 shows the rapidity with which extensive engrossments were accomplished in the years of the French war and high prices for grain, and shows, too, the character and extent of the change they worked in some country parishes.

In the parishes of Sabridgeworth, Much-Hadham and Stocking-Pelham in Hertfordshire, three wealthy farmers have, within a few years past, added to their own seven, eight and nine small farms of from fifty to one hundred and fifty acres each, and on each of which was formerly a farmhouse, yard, barns, etc., where the farmer was able to bring up his family comfortably, not only by the cultivation of corn and hay, but also by rearing of stock for the supply of the weekly markets, such as sheep, cows, calves, pigs and poultry. Mark the event! Instead of twenty-four farms, there are now only three; and no one of these three raises more stock on their whole united farms than any one of the twenty-four formerly did. . . . I must here observe the farmhouses monopolised are let out as cottages as long as they will stand without repair, and only a small piece of garden-ground sufficient for a few vegetables. . . . The wealthy farmer's attention is engrossed by the means of producing the greatest quantity of grain and hay; and when his harvest is over to let them lay in store till he can take advantage of the highest market price. The middling and poor farmer not only attends to the production of grain and hay, but also to the rearing of stock, all of which his needs compel him to carry to market as soon and as often as possible, that he may have wherewithal to pay his rent and taxes as they become due. The rich farmer's wife is above the drudgery of looking after pigs, geese, fowls, etc. The poor farmer's wife thinks these her treasures, nourishes them till they bring fourfold, and then adds their produce to her husband's store.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Arthur W. Ashby, *Allotments and Small Holdings in Oxfordshire*.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Wright, *A Short Address to the Public on the Monopoly of Small Farms*.

Many of the freeholders who did not sell out covered their new expenses by mortgaging their farms, and others incurred mortgages in order to buy new land, and thus put themselves in a position to practise the high farming, so remunerative in the early nineteenth century, and to conform to the general tendency towards production on a large scale. When prices for agricultural produce fell, their mortgages were often more than their farms could bear, and the engrossing landlords again had their opportunity.

To come to such figures as are available. Lord Ernle surmises that at least half the arable land of England was cultivated by the open-field system in 1700.<sup>1</sup> The inclosing movement, which many decried and others advocated, had proceeded to something like this stage, but no further. According to a contemporary estimate, necessarily approximate, which we have for 1688, there were then in the country forty thousand prosperous freeholders, who with their families numbered more than a quarter of a million persons, one hundred and forty thousand poorer freeholders who with their families numbered seven hundred thousand persons, and one hundred and fifty thousand rent-paying farmers who numbered two hundred and fifty thousand persons with their families. These figures show the yeomanry, a term which Latimer and others apply to leaseholders as well as to freeholders. The humbler rural class was made up of one and a quarter million "cottagers and paupers" and slightly more numerous "labouring

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 154.

## 184 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

people and out-servants." The whole rural population of England and Wales in 1696 was placed at rather more than four millions.<sup>1</sup>

In most Open-field Parishes (wrote John Cowper in 1732), there are, I believe, taking them at the medium, forty Farmers and double the number of Cottagers, who hold their lands in common,<sup>2</sup> and have Right of Commonage one with another. Let us suppose that each Farmer employs six labouring Persons besides himself and his wife ; and allow four persons to each Cottage . . .<sup>3</sup>

This picture may be taken as one which seemed passably true to Cowper's contemporaries.

Between 1700 and 1760, Acts of Parliament allowed the inclosure of nearly a quarter of a million acres made up of open fields and some waste, and seventy-five thousand acres of waste land only. By 1760, the date of the accession of George III, the smallholders had definitely lost their battle and had every strong power in the country against them. Two and a half million acres of open fields and waste land were inclosed between 1761 and 1801, one and a half million acres between 1802 and 1844 ; about three-quarters of a million acres of common waste in the earlier of these periods and nearly a thousand acres in the later. By the middle of the nineteenth century the work was done, although some two hundred thousand acres of open fields and waste and more than three hundred thousand acres of waste only

<sup>1</sup> Gregory King, op. cit., § iii, VI.

<sup>2</sup> This does not mean that each tenant did not hold his cultivated strips in severalty.

<sup>3</sup> John Cowper, *An Essay proving that Inclosing Commons and Common-field Lands is contrary to the interest of the Nation.*

were inclosed in 1845 and afterwards.<sup>1</sup> As for the freehold farmers, their periods of most rapid decline lay between 1600 and 1785 and between 1800 and 1862.

All over England the very great majority of small copyholders had been driven off the land or changed into landless wage-earners. Their holdings, together with those of nearly all the larger copyholders and the freeholders, and with some small manors, had been engrossed in big estates. These were held, save for the landlord's house and grounds, and the farm he often retained, in leasehold farms which, as the result of the engrossing, were in most parts of England of greater area than the earlier freehold, copyhold and leasehold farms. The leases were unlike those of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, by which the landlord had let both stock and land. By the modern lease the landlord let only the land and buildings and the farmer supplied the stock, so that the farmer was necessarily a capitalist; and in this he differed from the *métayer* of France and Italy who receives much of his stock from the landlord.

Such was the conversion of rural England, mainly accomplished between 1700 and 1850. At the present date, in spite of the effects of the modern movement in favour of smallholdings and allotments, about 70 per cent. of the cultivated land of England and Wales is divided into farms of more than a hundred acres.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Arthur H. Johnson, *The Disappearance of the Small Landowner*, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> A. W. and M. K. Ashby, *The Development of English Agriculture and Rural Life*, p. 24.

Economists have disputed the injury or the extent of the injury which was wrought to the public weal. It is, however, beyond dispute that strong popular resentment was aroused. This is evident in sermons and in literature: Catholics like Sir Thomas More, Protestants like Latimer, fashionable writers of Carolingian comedies like Massinger, eighteenth-century poets like Goldsmith, eighteenth-century essayists like the *Spectator*, and many less distinguished men of varying opinions are uncompromising in their condemnation through some two centuries. It is hard not to believe that the compilers of the Book of Common Prayer had inclosers in mind when, in the Communion Service, they placed a curse on him "who removeth his neighbour's landmark." The offence was one against a very deeply rooted, a very historical prejudice. It is no surprise to hear of a superstition that the man who inclosed a common or open fields seldom lived to see his inclosing hedges grow up, and that his estate seldom remained many years longer in his family.<sup>1</sup> Inclosers were, like the grantees of the property of the religious, regarded as sinners, whom God must punish. Moreover, they gave reasonable cause of offence even to the large farmers, the only class besides the landlords whom they did not injure directly. "The great farmer," says a pamphlet published in 1772, "dreads an increase of rent, and being constrained to a system of agriculture which neither his inclination or experience would tempt him to."<sup>2</sup> It is, however,

<sup>1</sup> John Cowper, op. cit.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Lord Ernle in *English Farming Past and Present*, p. 301.

noticeable that about the end of this century protests became less numerous and ceased to emanate from high places. The quite apparent greater productiveness of inclosed lands had won over important public opinion, and moreover, the whole business had become too much of a commonplace to be interesting, and the smallholders were sinking below the level at which a class expresses its grievances.

It is indisputable that in many individual instances inclosures did cause "diminution of labour" and depopulation. The pamphleteer John Cowper, writing in 1732, states that such was always their result.

I myself, within these thirty Years past, have seen about twenty Lordships or Parishes inclosed, and every one of them has thereby been in a manner depopulated. If we take all the inclosed Parishes one with another, we shall hardly find ten Inhabitants remaining, where there were an Hundred before the Inclosures were made. And in some Parishes, a Hundred and twenty Families of Farmers and Cottagers, have in a few Years been reduced to Four, to Two, nay, and sometimes to but One Family. . . . Raising Hedgēs, and Sinking Ditches may indeed employ several Hands for a Year, or hardly so long, but when that is once over, the work is at an End; for three or four old men in a Parish are sufficient to keep them in Repair, and the rest must remove to Open-field Parishes if they hope for farther Employment. Hence it is, that the Owners of Inclosed Lands, if they have but a little Corn to get in, are already forced to send several Miles to those Parishes for Harvest-Men.

This is the history in prose of Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*, which was first printed in 1769, and which, Goldsmith assures Sir Joshua Reynolds in the



dedication, he drew not from fancy, but from observation.

Sweet smiling village, loveliest of the lawn,  
Thy sports are fled, and all thy charms withdrawn ;  
Amidst thy bowers the tyrant's hand is seen,  
And desolation saddens all thy green :  
One only master grasps the whole domain,  
And half a tillage stints thy smiling plain.

On the other hand, Arthur Young, writing in 1801 of the arable county of Norfolk, states that where the land was kept in tillage, inclosure caused "without any question, a considerable increase of employment truly valuable to the poor." But Young, advocate though he was of inclosures in the interests of better farming, considered that, even in Norfolk, they usually injured rather than benefited the labouring class because they took from them their cottages and plots of land, obliged them to sell their cows and deprived them of their old right to take from the commons turf, peat, furze, or wood for fuel. He noted that inclosures tended to send up poor-rates and that they had a bad moral effect.

Go to an alehouse kitchen of an old inclosed country, and there you will see the origin of poverty and poor-rates. For whom are they to be sober ? For whom are they to save ? (Such are their questions.) For the parish ? If I am diligent, shall I have leave to build a cottage ? If I am sober, shall I have land for a cow ? If I am frugal, shall I have half an acre of potatoes ? You offer no motives ; you have nothing but a parish-officer and a workhouse ! Bring me another pot !<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Young, *An Inquiry into the Propriety of applying Waste to the better Maintenance and Support of the Poor.*

Until the later narrowing of the demand for labour by the introduction of farm machinery, the intensification of agriculture may in some inclosed parishes have outbalanced the economy of labour effected by single control, but even in these parishes the people kept on the land suffered because from landholders they had become wage-earners. They had lost their whole or partial independence of masters, their power of initiative and the stimulus of ownership. They had lost the sense of security which their tenure, even of holdings which did not wholly support them, had given them. More than this, the mass of the rural population suffered a definite decrease of their material resources; the hired labourers were worse fed, housed and clothed than the old smallholders. The poor-rates of inclosed parishes were alone proof of this. Until the period of industrial expansion, nearly all the dispossessed peasants and small farmers became agricultural labourers, some migrating from inclosed to uninclosed parishes and from grass to arable districts, and their wages never allowed of saving, but were merely an exiguous provision for daily needs. "As soon as the little schools of industry are grasped into the hands of an over-grown rapacious farmer," Nathaniel Kent wrote in 1775, "the former occupiers are at once all reduced to the state of day-labourers; and when their health or strength fails, there is but one resource; they and their children are thrown upon the parish." Of their livelihood when they were not out of work, the same writer calculates that it was impossible for the household of a labourer, consisting of himself, his

wife and five young children, to eat anything but dry bread, even when he was fully employed, and his wife earned money in her spare time.<sup>1</sup> This was the man whose ancestors had had their own cottage and garden-plot, their cow and pig, poultry and flock of geese. Moreover, from the latter part of the eighteenth century until the rise of the industrial towns, there was acute unemployment in English countrysides. A witness before the Commission on Labourers' Wages stated in 1824 that from five to forty persons were out of work in most parishes. As for the labourers' dwellings they hired such as were to be had. In many parishes they were available only for the men a farmer employed, so that tenure of a job and of a lodging were equally insecure. The quality of the lodging was often deplorable. Nathaniel Kent speaks of "the shattered hovels which half the poor of this kingdom are obliged to put up with"; and a witness before the 1867 Royal Commission declared that, in one district, "the majority of the cottages that exist in rural parishes are deficient in almost every requisite that should constitute a home for a Christian family in a civilised community."<sup>2</sup> It is only very recently that this judgment has ceased to be true of most of England. It is no wonder that in the early nineteenth century there was an outbreak of crime in the English country. Gangs of thieves, made up of labourers, some artisans, and even a few small farmers, broke into corn-lofts

<sup>1</sup> *Hints to Gentlemen of Landed Property.*

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in *Village Trade Unions in Two Centuries*, by Ernest Selley.

and barns and were able to sell their booty to small farmers. Unpopular large farmers went in fear of having their houses or barns gutted or their ricks burnt. The public attempts to deal with rural grievances consisted mainly in the administration of outdoor relief to under-employed labourers, and—when this was held to be a bolstering of a bad state of affairs—in the 1834 Poor Law Amendment. But the real cause of the wretchedness and the crime was left almost untouched, the changed agrarian system which had deflected the produce of the soil from those who tilled it to town markets and foreign markets.

The land question means hunger, thirst, nakedness, notice to quit, labour spent in vain, the toil of years seized upon, the breaking-up of homes; the misery of parents, children and wives; the despair and wildness that springs up in the hearts of the poor when legal force, like a sharp arrow, goes over the most sensitive and vital rights of mankind. All this is concerned in the land question.<sup>1</sup>

The land question ceased to threaten public order only when industrialism brought about the rural exodus.

Young's remedy was of the right kind, but on too small a scale. He understood, in his later years, that it was the landlessness of the rural working class which had changed them from a valuable and stable to a dangerous and unhappy element in English society. He advocated allotments—a cottage and a plot of from one to five acres of land for every poor

<sup>1</sup> Cardinal Manning.

family ; and in the first half of the nineteenth century some of the land of a parish which was inclosed was often set aside to form the so-called " fuel allotments " and " poor allotments." Other allotments were provided by private persons and charitable bodies, and after 1887 by the local government authorities. But no free cottages stood on these allotments, and they were never of an importance to retrieve the rural labouring class of any part of England from the condition of landless men to which they had been brought. It has been ascertained that of the allotments in Oxfordshire in 1887, five thousand three hundred and forty were field allotments, between one fourth of an acre and five acres in size, but nine thousand two hundred and twenty-four mere garden allotments not more than a quarter of an acre in area. In 1913 it was estimated that about one-third of the villages of England and Wales were without any allotments. Moreover, there was a danger in the circumstance that allotments were provided and awarded by local authorities, on whose deliberative bodies farmers were well represented. After the breakdown of the efforts of the agricultural labourers to improve their position in the 'seventies, farmers began to employ men, engaged by the week, for short hours and low wages, on the tacit understanding that they eked out a livelihood from their allotments.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to recollect that the husbandmen of the older England had other occupations than tillage. As early as the twelfth century, records show

<sup>1</sup> Arthur W. Ashby, *Allotments and Small Holdings in Oxfordshire*.

villages which had a fuller's mill, as well as the inevitable corn-mill; there were malt-houses, breweries, tanneries and potteries in rural districts from the Middle Ages downwards. The most important home industries were connected with the production of wool—wool-combing, wool-spinning and the weaving of woollen fabrics. Linen and hemp were also spun and woven, and straw-plaiting, lacemaking, the making of reed mats, glovemaking, bootmaking, basketwork, turnery, cooperage, broom making and other industries were carried on in the cottages. The peasant and the members of his family thus followed crafts, to occupy evenings and slack seasons and to employ those not fit for heavy labour, and by so doing they added to their income, avoided the dullness induced by sameness of work and made an appreciable contribution to the country's wealth. Peasant industries linger here and there in England, because of the extraordinary vitality their old importance has given them, but of that importance they are quite bereft. They have dwindled to survivals. The cottagers were deprived of this resource partly by the centralisation of trade in towns, and by the institution of the factory system, but in great part they lost it when they lost their greater leisure and their homes in which their implements were kept and transmitted from generation to generation, and near which they had their markets and the sources whence they obtained their material.

In its every aspect, the case of the engrossing landlords is better argued from the point of view

of mere farming, than from that of the rural labouring population. It is a real offence to men of goodwill that the land of a country should be starved or under-cultivated, or that its flocks and herds should be allowed to dwindle or degenerate. The open-field system was uneconomical and inelastic. The agricultural science which had reached the point of organising it made hardly any further progress. It rather declined, as the communal life of villages weakened, and therewith the joint enterprise necessary to open-field cultivation. At the same time, there is a mass of evidence that many commons gave poor pasturage, and that the stock kept on them were thin and suffered from infectious diseases, and from difficulties in the way of careful breeding. These drawbacks undoubtedly increased as commons were narrowed, and were therefore apt to be overcrowded. But even in the eighteenth century, England was too thickly settled a country to make common pastures, under a loose system of management, consistent with good stock-farming, just as knowledge of agriculture had advanced beyond the point at which it could be applied to open-field cultivation. From the point of view of farming, a change was needed. Had the engrossing landlords been inhibited some other instrument of change must have been found. Small self-contained farms, like many on the Continent, might have been formed and intensive cultivation might have been practised on them. The communal life of villages might have been revived and developed so as to secure an effective control of the animals pastured collectively, or even beyond

this, so as to allow of co-operative arable farming on a large scale. Failing all else, Young's remedy might have been tried: there might have been a general provision of adequate allotments to a peasantry which would still have enjoyed the sense of property, and some sense of security, and have had a stable tie to the soil. These expedients might have been combined. After all, England has, north, south, east and west of her, countries which practise scientific agriculture and which are not wholly given up, land, stock and buildings, to engrossing landlords and capitalist farmers.

In the nineteenth century another change came to the English land. The advance of agricultural science was accompanied by an increase of the capital invested in the industry by the farmer and landlord. But the end of the French War lowered the price of wheat, and the repeal of the Corn Laws and the cheapening of transport brought into the country quantities of agricultural produce which was sold at a low rate. Prices fell for the English farmer, so that the return on the capital invested in agriculture became low in proportion to that on the capital invested in industry. There was a definite loss to the population whose income was derived from the land; and the landlord and the farmer shifted some of it from one to the other, and to the labourer. Rents were high in the late eighteenth and the earlier nineteenth century, when economists even held that the landlord who raised rents was a public benefactor, spurring his farmers to improve their land in order to increase their yield. But from about



1870 rents were so much lowered that the loss due to the competition of foreign produce came to be borne as much by the landlord as by the farmer. On many farms this loss was reduced by putting arable land under grass, a change which saved several items of expenditure, but especially that which stood for wages. In this way the demand for agricultural labour was lowered, and a shrinkage of the rural population ensued.

During the recent war such a need arose for home-grown foodstuffs that the prices of agricultural produce were increased; and Government, by guaranteeing the price of wheat until 1921, seemed to warrant that they would remain steadily near their new level. The farmer had to share his additional gains with his labourers, whose wages were augmented by law and further augmented by the collective bargaining of the trades-unions, but he was exempted from giving any part of them to his landlord, because the raising of rents was made illegal. At the same time the object of all the Government regulations, which was to extend the arable area, was only very partially attained, partly because the war made such a deficiency in the supply of labour as high wages could not fill. A principal result was that many farmers were enriched, and many landlords were simultaneously impoverished by taxation. Numerous landlords have been driven to sell their lands: according to W. G. G. in the *Saturday Review*,<sup>1</sup> one firm of estate agents in Hanover Square turned over, in the four years from 1917 to 1920, an area equal to

<sup>1</sup> March 4, 1922.

that of the counties of Buckingham, Bedford, Middlesex, Hertford and Oxford, and more than seven hundred thousand acres are still changing hands every year. A large number of the purchasers have been tenant farmers, who made money during the war and in the two years after the armistice, and who have bought their own farms, forming a new class of freehold farmers. It is doubtful whether all will be able to maintain their position, for they have risen in difficult times. The price of wheat, which is no longer guaranteed, has fallen from an average of 80s. 10d. a quarter in 1920, to one of 45s. in January 1922, and the price of meat and wool has also been approximately halved. Feeding-stuffs, artificial manures and railway transport remain enormously more expensive than in 1914; rates and taxes are unprecedentedly high. The farmer has difficulty in passing on part of his risks or his losses to the consumer because he is exposed to competition from importers.<sup>1</sup> He has difficulty in passing them on to his labourers, by lowering wages, because English agricultural labourers are now organised in strong trades-unions.

The recently sold estates have also been bought by the new rich of the war. These enriched financiers, merchants and manufacturers have, unlike those of England in the fifteenth, sixteenth and eighteenth, and even in the earlier nineteenth century, no ambition to adopt the profession of landlord or farmer. Their desire is to own "country seats" and sporting properties.

<sup>1</sup> *Land Union Journal*, February 1922.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE WAGE-EARNING LABOURER

WHERE wages are earned in an agricultural society, there must be, to provide the earners, a supply of landless or insufficiently landed men, and to provide the market for their labour there must be farms which are too large to be worked only by the holder and the members of his family. Both the men with very small holdings and the large farms have, however, been present where there have been no wage-earners. A landlord's large home farm has been entirely cultivated by the customary labour of tenants whose own holdings would not have supported them without the allowances they received, not as wages, but of their customary right, on the days they worked for him. Moreover, extensive farms have been tilled, without any employment of paid labour, by the composite families which have commonly existed in peasant societies from the Middle Ages down to this day.

The distribution of land into large and small holdings does not, therefore, necessitate the existence of hired labourers. But they have tended, naturally and almost irresistibly, to arise under it. There were, first, the men without kin, who in countries which are not industrialised are most easily absorbed

by agriculture. In South Slavia and the Scottish Highlands they were apt to be attached to the family groups by adoption, but in most countries they became hired men. There were, too, the failures, the peasants turned off their holdings because they did not fulfil their obligations. They and their children readily hired themselves to do the only kind of work of which they had any knowledge. There were the peasants' sons whom the family holding could not support, or who rebelled against the authority of the family chief, in particular the control of marriages which maintained a proportion between the size of families and the size of holdings. Altogether, it is easy to see how a class of landless men would arise in a rural society. The fact that agriculture is a seasonal industry made an opportunity for the smallest landholders also to earn wages, and agriculture was much more seasonal than it is now when a primitive system of crop rotation was followed and only rude farming implements were used. Custom ruled, indeed, that the tenants should give special days of work in the seasons of heavy work ; but beyond this it was natural that, during the hay-harvest, the corn-harvest and the vintage, the cottar family should neglect all but essential household work, and all the handicrafts which could be as well pursued in slack seasons, and should give to the large farmer the labour which he welcomed and which was not needed to garner the cottar's own small crop. Thus from very early times wages were earned in agriculture both by labourers employed permanently and by seasonal workers, both by landless men and by

small landholders. And when, over a great part of Europe, it became usual for the more important customary tenants, those whose holdings supported their households adequately, to commute for rents their obligation to work on their landlord's demesne, the labour they no longer rendered had to be supplied, in return for wages, by the landless men and the smaller tenants. These last, also, sometimes commuted the labour to which their tenure bound them, or some of it, for rents, and thus this labour also came to be done for wages. The smallest tenants came to be partially dependent on wages for a livelihood.

The dialogue in *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, between Reason and a begging priest gives the impression that in fourteenth-century England a man had no place in society unless he were in Holy Orders, or held land, or had "lineage rich" to protect him, or followed a craft, or worked for wages on the land; and it is this last alternative which the picture, drawn, it is true, from a ploughman's point of view, throws most into relief. Reason addresses the priest, advising him to change his profession.

"Cans't thou serve," he said, "but by singing in church,  
Put hay in cocks for my harvestmen, pitch it into the cart,  
Mow other mowing, bind up other sheaves,  
Reap or be a reaping-reeve, and arise early,  
Or have a horn and be a hayward, and lie out o' nights,  
And keep my corn in my croft from pickers and thieves?  
Wear other shaped shoon and clothes, keep other sheep  
and kine,  
Do hedging or harrowing, drive swine or geese,  
Or follow any other craft to fulfil common needs,  
And give to the bedridden wherewith to live?"

" Certes," I said, " and so help me God,  
 I am too weak to work with sickle or scythe,  
 And too long, by your leave, for to stoop low,  
 And work as a workman and any while endure."  
 " Then hast thou lands to live by," quoth Reason, " or  
 lineage rich  
 That find thee thy food ? " †

Boccaccio in the *Decameron* repeatedly takes for granted or alludes to wage-earning labourers on the land. It is clear that this class was important in England, France and Italy before the middle of the fourteenth century. Even were there not much other evidence, the fact would be proved for France and England by the legislation which followed the Black Death. This deadly epidemic reduced the supply of rural labour below the demand for it ; the labourers profited to exact higher wages, and the employing class thereupon obtained laws to check this increase of their farming costs.

The first English Statute of Labourers, passed in 1349, makes work for wages compulsory for persons without sufficient means of their own, and regulates its conditions. Every able person under sixty " not having to live on " is compelled to work for any employer who requires his services, saving that " bondmen and land tenants " must give preference, among employers, to their landlords. The proviso plainly refers to the work done for hire by small customary tenants. Further, all men are forbidden to give anything " under colour of pity or alms " to " valiant beggars," for these " as long as they may

live of begging, do refuse to labour." It is laid down that wages are to be paid at former rates without increase, and that farm-servants who leave their employment without "reasonable cause or license" are to be imprisoned. Among farm-labourers, ploughmen, reapers and mowers are specified. An enactment that foodstuffs are to be sold at "reasonable prices" is probably partly directed at small tenants who found that the new excellence of their markets exempted them from earning wages.

This law proved inadequate to its purpose and the Second Statute of Labourers was passed in the next year. It betrays that some labourers had formed the habit of moving about the country in search of the best market for their labour, a new way of theirs which must have seemed to their contemporaries nothing less than revolutionary, and which was really subversive of the strongly localised mediæval economy. "The said servants . . ." says the preamble to the statute, "to their ease and singular covetise do withdraw themselves to serve great men and others, unless they have livery and wages to the double or treble of what they were wont to take." By the word livery all allowances in kind—food, lodging and clothes—are covered. The statute checks the beginnings of a reign of free competition by enacting that wages and liveries are to be at the same rate as in the twentieth year of the king's reign, that is five years earlier than its own date and immediately before the pestilence. Wages, to be paid by the year or "other usual terms," are

fixed for carters, ploughmen, team-drivers, shepherds, swineherds and dairymen—evidently the most important categories of permanently hired farm-servants. Daily and piece wages are determined for the seasonal workers: the mowers, paid by the acre or by the day; the reapers, by the day or by the measure of corn; the threshers, by the measure of corn. A very striking clause shows that there was already an established migration of seasonal labour, from northern districts for the earlier harvest-work of the south, and probably also from districts in which holdings were smaller to those in which they were larger. It orders that no worker “go out of the town, where he dwelleth in the winter, to serve the summer, if he may serve in the same town, taking as before is said. Saving that the people of the counties of Stafford and Derby, and people of Craven, and of the marches of Wales and Scotland, may come in time of August, and labour in other counties, and safely return; as they were wont to do before this time.”

A parallel statute passed in 1350, to regulate the wages of the agricultural labourers of France, gives an even more vivid picture of this class in the fourteenth century. It would seem that the plague had caused in France a dearth of labour beyond that in England, or that the stable demand in the more southern country was larger and the scarcity therefore more acutely felt, for workers whose wages are not fixed at a certain sum are, with one exception, allowed to take “one-third more than before the mortality,” and there is a ruling that men are to



be employed to dig and hoe vineyards only where horses cannot plough.

Evidently the casual labour, largely supplied by the smallest landholders, was much used. Daily wages, varying with seasons, are fixed for men and women working in vineyards, for reapers and for men carting wine, grain, fruit, straw or other goods with one, two or three horses. Wages by the day or the piece are fixed for woodmen; wages by the measure of land for ploughmen and for reapers of hay and oats; and wages by the measure of wheat or oats for the threshers who in barns and using flails performed their laborious task between St. Remigius' Day, the first of October, and Easter. The prices which coopers and carpenters might take for making barrels are likewise determined.

An interesting provision concerns tenants of vineyards who had also undertaken to work in the vineyards of others. They might tend their own vines on Mondays, Tuesdays and Saturdays, but must work for others on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, receiving as wages one-third more than before the mortality.

The farm-servants permanently hired included stockmen, carters and women servants. Of the stockmen employed by individual farmers, the men who herded horses, sheep and other beasts might take as wages only one-third more grain and money than before the mortality and might not leave their masters; yearly wages are fixed for a cowman in charge of thirty cows or more, and for a shepherd. But the cowherds, swineherds and shepherds hired

by the village communities might receive no more wages than they had done before the pestilence.

For carters permanently employed, a wage is fixed for the half-year from St. John's Day to Martinmas, and a less wage for the winter half-year. They are declared entitled to the costs, at the old accustomed rates, of their food and drink, which they must have carried with them on their journeys or bought in inns, and they might not refuse to be hired on the terms specified nor leave the masters whose service they had entered. Women servants who did indoor work and milked cows are stated to be similarly bound, and their wages are similarly fixed for the summer and for the winter half-year.

This class, that of the wage-earners, was thus important in Western Europe in the fourteenth century, and whenever *latifundia* were made, they tended to strengthen it. Where they were formed by evictions of husbandmen, the "poor, silly, wretched souls," "thrust out of their own," such as Sir Thomas More pitied, could for long centuries do little else but increase the supply of landless agricultural labourers. The history of the land of England may be summarised as the gradual diversion of the poorer members of rural society from the position of landholders to that of labourers solely dependent on wages. The process accompanied that elimination of copyhold and small freehold and leasehold tenure which has been described. It has been seen, however, that in some countries *latifundia* were formed, not because small tenants were expelled, but because they were not forthcoming: *latifundia*

arose for lack of husbandmen. It is none the less true that every latifundium, even the most extensively farmed, is worked by hired labour—at the least it employs shepherds—and therefore, presupposes wage-earning labourers. Moreover, wherever it is not wholly given up to pastoral farming, it necessitates seasonal labour. Some latifundia directly increased the number of the landless and therefore the supply of wage-earning labourers, and all made a market for wage-earning labour.

Every circumstance and event which weakened the small holder also enlarged the supply of hired agricultural labour—the loss of common rights, the disuse of communal enterprise, the break-up of families, the subdivision of small holdings, mortgaging, subletting, the decline of village industries other than agriculture, and of cottage industries. Each of these meant that some peasants had to leave their own land and depend entirely on wages, while a larger number came to depend on them partially. The same effect has followed the increased demand for necessities, luxuries and leisure made by land-workers in modern times. In England, the peasants were eliminated so early that they never desired to live on the modern relatively luxurious and leisurely plan. In France, the men with a new standard of living, which they could not maintain on their small farms, have drifted to the towns. But in Italy, and to a less extent in Spain, countries which have small markets for urban labour, the peasants have sometimes abandoned the frugality and the assiduous industriousness which made life on their holdings

possible. Conscription, which brought them into contact with townsmen, did much to teach them new standards, and in Italy the Great War has done much more. And in Italy, as in Spain, peasants who overburden their holdings with mortgages and rents, and peasants who leave their holdings, have within their own country little choice but to become agricultural wage-earners.

Thus, circumstances affecting smallholders have, since the Middle Ages, increased the supply of wage-earning agricultural labour. Meanwhile, from the eighteenth century onwards, the capitalist farmer made a demand for this labour larger than any previously known. It was most effective in England, but it was also of great consequence in North-East Germany, where it directly caused a weakening of small holdings. This demand robbed many North German peasants of all their rights of property in land, while it deprived others of their commons and reduced their arable holdings to the plots which surrounded their cottages and out-buildings. Advantage was taken of the mobility which Frederick the Great gave to rights of property in land to satisfy the enthusiasm of Prussian landlords for high farming. Their taste was shared by a minority of landlords in other parts of Germany and in Hungary, Poland, Bohemia, Moravia, Belgium and France. And wherever there was capitalist farming, the existence of wage-earning labourers was fostered.

In the nineteenth century the position of the rural labourers of Europe was modified by industrialism. Industrialism opened an enormous market for labour

and made large towns, the tentacular towns which draw the countrymen by their sociability, their distractions and their convenience, and by their varied and many opportunities for prosperity and adversity. The modern social phenomenon known as the rural exodus is a direct result of industrialism. It is exactly true that in proportion as a country is industrialised its population is attracted from the rural districts to the towns, that in industrial countries the urban population progresses in inverse ratio to the rural population. In the most highly industrialised countries, England, Belgium, France and parts of Germany and Austria, there was, in the later nineteenth century, such a drain of population from the country to the towns that the supply of rural labour fell below the demand for it. In spite of the introduction of farm machinery, which diminished the need for farm labour, this was so. The fact is not surprising since the percentage of the total population formed by town-dwellers rose, between 1860 and 1900, from 45 to 68 in Great Britain and Ireland, from 45 to 60 in Belgium, from 33 to 47 in Germany, from 29 to 41 in France, and from 34 to 48 in the whole of Western Europe.<sup>1</sup>

But in the non-industrial countries—Italy, Spain, Hungary, Poland, other parts of Central Europe—where there were latifundia and a class of landless labourers, and where the position of the smallholders had been weakened, there was, on the other hand,

<sup>1</sup> Gustav Sundbärg, *Aperçus statistiques internationaux* (Stockholm, 1908), Tables 3 and 4.

a surplus of agricultural labour, particularly after the use of farm machinery had become widespread. On the eve of the Great War the countries of Europe might be roughly divided into three classes: there were the industrial countries which had an insufficient supply of agricultural labour; there were the non-industrial countries in which there was agricultural unemployment, often acute; and there was a third class formed by countries still wholly, or all but wholly divided into adequate small holdings. Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Holland, Bavaria, much of Austria, Serbia, Bulgaria and Montenegro: these lands of prosperous small farmers are spared all the graver problems created by an agricultural proletariat.

To come to an examination of the wage-earners. There were little more than half a million persons who earned wages in agriculture in England and Wales in 1911, and less than a hundred thousand in Scotland, whereas in France in 1906 they numbered two and a half millions, in Germany in 1907 nearly three and a half millions, in Hungary in 1910 more than four millions, in Italy in 1911 more than four and a half millions. In all these Continental countries there are also many smallholders, not classed as paid labourers in the census returns, who earn some wages by doing fieldwork. Although, therefore, in England very nearly the whole rural labouring population is made up of wage-earners, they yet do not form a relatively numerous section of the nation. On the continent of Europe, where they are only part of the land working-class, they

have a far greater importance, both relative and absolute.

Everywhere they are divided into the men and women permanently employed, generally hired for a year or six months, and the day labourers. The former may share their employer's life, like the single woman servant so often found on French, Scandinavian, German and Austrian peasant farms, like the Aberdeenshire ploughmen who eat in the farmhouse kitchen and sleep in their "chaumers" on the steading, and like the Breton *valets de ferme* who have their box-beds in the general room of the farmhouse, beside those of their employers. They may share the life of the beasts, sleeping, if not eating, in byres and stables, as stockmen often do in all the Continental countries which employ them. They may have their separate dormitories within the farmhouse or steading, as on some large farms in North-East Germany, and as on the Scottish farms on which the bothie system is in use. Or the farmer may provide, as part of wages, a cottage or other dwelling for each farm-servant and his family, a practice easily followed where farms include the former houses of small tenants, and one which is usual in East Scotland, North-East Germany and Sweden. Or the labourer who is permanently employed on a farm may have to rent his own lodging, as he generally does in England and often in Hungary ; or, as frequently happens in South Italy, he may own a dwelling in some town or village not too inaccessible to his place of work.

In every country the districts in which farm-

servants are best off and happiest are those in which farms are small or medium sized, in which the old patriarchal relations subsist between employers and employed. The picture of life on a Provençal farm during the earlier half of last century which Mistral gives in his preface to *Lis Iselo d'or*, and George Macdonald's pictures of farmhouse life in Aberdeenshire, might even now be paralleled in some parts of France, on some Lombard dairy-farms, in Bavaria, in South-West or North-East Scotland.

In Great Britain agricultural day-labourers are nowhere important: although over the greater part of England all farm hands are hired by the week they are, in practice, permanently employed. In France the number of the day-labourers is, according to the census, about one-third that of the farm-servants, but this excludes the smallholders partially dependent on wages. In Germany landless day-labourers are less numerous than farm-servants, but there are many smallholders who work for wages. In Italy, on the other hand, the day-labourers far outnumber the farm-servants, who are little employed save on the dairy-farms of the Lombard plain. Italy included in 1911 less than half a million farm-servants and more than four million day-labourers, a number which does not include all the smallholders who do some work for wages. In Hungary most of the field-work, as distinct from work among stock, is done by day-labourers.

The day-labourers of Europe exist on the horns of a dilemma. If they are smallholders the market for their labour is restricted to the district within



## 162 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

reach of their homes, and they often suffer from its narrowness. Even in countries in which, like France, there is a scarcity of agricultural labour, they may, in a particular district, be short of work or be compelled to accept bad conditions. If, on the other hand, they are landless men, they not only are perpetually liable to be left without resources, but also are exposed to unequal competition from landholders. It is only very rarely that they earn wages which maintain them adequately in the slack season of the farming year when many of them are out of work.

When agricultural Europe is regarded as a whole—the countries which have a shortage and those which have a surplus of agricultural labour, the incidence of busy seasons at different times of the year in different countries, even in different districts of the same country—the solution of the problem of agricultural unemployment which first suggests itself is that the supply of labour should be made fluid. It seems desirable that the surplus which exists in one place should be transferred to meet a deficit in another place. In some degree this process has always gone on—even in the fourteenth century the under-employed men from the north and west of England came in time of harvest to the south. Such annual migrations of agricultural labourers from one district of a country to another no longer occur in England where the large use of farm machinery has brought the seasonal demand for labour so low that it can be supplied locally. But to this day there are many migrations in Europe for the harvests and

the vintage. In Italy they are directed towards the rice-fields of Lombardy and Piedmont and the vinelands of Foggia and Latium; in Spain, from the northern districts of small holdings to the latifundia of the centre and the south; in Hungary, towards the corn-growing Great Plain; in Sweden, towards the large beet-growing farms of the south; in Germany towards those of the north-east.

Further, for half a century or so before the Great War, when arable cultivation on a large scale, in particular the growing of root-crops, was widely practised, and when frontiers were neither as numerous nor as impassable as they have since become, there were similar migrations of agricultural labourers from one country to another. Thus in the late autumn numbers of Irish peasants came regularly, as they still come, to the West of Scotland for the potato-lifting. In North-East Germany tillage depended, to an important extent, on immigrants from outlying parts of Prussia and the mountainous districts of Germany, but also from German and Russian Poland, Galicia, Ruthenia and Hungary. They arrived in the spring and stayed from seven to ten months, working in particular in the sugar-beet districts, and on the largest properties where they were sometimes as numerous as the native labourers. In 1914 there were nearly half a million foreign agricultural labourers in Germany, and since it has been calculated that a quarter of a million Poles were working on German soil in 1920,<sup>1</sup> the

<sup>1</sup> *Der Landarbeiter* (Berlin), March 1, 1921.

## 164 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

war interrupted this migratory movement only temporarily. Poles and Galicians were also employed before the war in the sugar-beet districts of Sweden and on the few large farms of Denmark ; and there was an immigration for the harvest from Hungary, Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia to the large farms of Lower Austria. In France, during the war, there was a considerable seasonal immigration of farm hands from Spain, Portugal and Italy, and since the dearth of agricultural labour due to the war still exists, these immigrants are still encouraged.

The seasonal migrants are mainly drawn from the class of the peasants whose own holdings do not require, throughout the year, the whole labour of the households established on them. In Poland, which is probably the most important country of seasonal emigration, the larger peasant farms are still generally cultivated by patriarchal families who often can spare the labour of some of their young men and women. Similarly, it is the young men of the smallholders' families in North Spain who do much of the seasonal work on the latifundia of the South. But in all the countries of seasonal emigration some of the emigrants come from the smallest holdings, which are inadequate to support a household, and which can, at a pinch, be cultivated or undercultivated by women and children and old men. In Poland, for instance, there were in 1904, four hundred thousand holdings of less than six acres of land.

Beyond this seasonal migration of companies of agricultural labourers from one part of Europe to

another, there is, in modern times, an overseas emigration of country folk, who often find the market for their labour not in the agriculture but in the industry of the lands of their settlement.

For emigration across the Atlantic, once a chief adventure of the hardest of mankind, has become a commonplace. Transport has been made cheap and convenient; steamers have multiplied; transatlantic governments and employers have held out lures to settlers and wage-earners; and many family ties have come to bridge the ocean. In the first years of the twentieth century the peasant of Western Europe who emigrated to America was often following the line of least resistance. The great body of the emigrants is made up of peasants from the countries of West Europe, and in the United States the majority are absorbed by the towns. A Scottish emigration, mainly to Canada, and an Irish emigration, mainly to the States, began on a large scale in the middle of last century, as a direct result of the potato famine and of agrarian troubles. The Spanish and Portuguese emigration to South America, Cuba and Mexico, is traditional, but has been greatly increased in recent years by the easier travelling. The great Italian emigratory movement, which is directed to the United States and, in less degree, to South America, set in about 1880, and had brought the Italian population of the States to close on two millions in 1912. On the eve of the war, emigration to America had caused in Scotland, Ireland, Italy and Spain a depopulation which troubled al-

patriotic persons. Yet the Italian and Spanish Governments encouraged rather than impeded it, so fearful were they of heightening the acute agricultural unemployment. As travelling became less adventurous and news was more widely disseminated, the attraction from overseas spread to Central and Eastern Europe, whence also there was a considerable peasant emigration before the war. In fact, in non-industrial countries, the lands across the Atlantic seem to be destined to perform the function discharged in industrial countries by the tentacular towns, that of drawing off the surplus supply of rural labour. Certainly, emigration is already saving the Italian, Spanish and Scottish nations from some of the dangerous discontent which is the consequence of the existence of large undeveloped latifundia. And there are already signs that the attraction from overseas is, like that of the great towns, too strong for the welfare of the countrysides of Europe.

In Italy, emigration has had an effect additional to that of diminishing the rural population. So attached are the Italians to their homes, that nearly half the emigrants return to their native villages when they have made their small piles. So the South Italian peasant, who has spent his best years working for wages in New York or Philadelphia, returns as an ageing man to the tiny holding his wife has kept going with the help of his remittances, and brings with him savings which are a small fortune as things go in Campania or Calabria. And the landless labourer also comes home with his savings,

and he spends part of them on buying a few acres of land. Thus there has arisen in South Italy a class of intelligent small capitalist farmers, practising intensive cultivation—the so-called “Americani.”

## CHAPTER X

### RURAL SYNDICALISM

THE growth of the industrial towns and the habit of overseas emigration have taken away from the land of Europe many of the countrymen to which it can no longer give a livelihood. Another modern movement endeavours to keep the countryman on the soil, preserving for him his share of the soil's yield.

This is syndicalism, which has spread to the agricultural labourers of all countries of West and Central Europe. It reached them after the industrial workers, chiefly because of their slowness to develop class consciousness. For landworkers have tended to look upon themselves as earning wages only because of exceptional bad luck or in an emergency. The smallholders they include have made their own land their main object and regarded their earnings as merely accessory to their produce, while the landless men have felt themselves outcasts from the peasant class and have been obsessed by land hunger. This passion—no less word describes it—is at the root, even to-day, of most rural discontents. It is spontaneous in the children of the soil and so deep-seated that it is doubtful whether they ever lose it entirely. Even the English agricultural labourers, the longest and

most completely dispossessed of all, are so invariably eager for allotments, and have been, in modern times, so easily deflected from a struggle for better wages to one for their own cottages and cultivable plots, that the desire plainly lingers in them.

Further, among farm-servants the syndicalist movement has been kept back by the old patriarchal tradition. Thus in France, where farm-servants outnumber day-labourers, agricultural trade-unionism has never acquired much strength. But there is in France a certain modern tendency towards the management of large farms by men who have little in common with the rural labouring class, and it is this tendency which has, in all countries, strengthened syndicalism among farm-servants. They have organised for the protection of their own interests when they have discovered these to be separate from those of their masters.

Rural syndicalism is also impeded by the fact that rural society is obedient to custom as no urban society ever can be. Urban society, which has neither memory nor ancestors, is ever glad to hear some new thing; but rural society has a long memory, and is so fully aware of grandfatherly usages that it can hardly forbear to respect them. The countryman's natural impulse is to do, for his good or ill, as his grandfather did, mainly because knowledge of his grandfather's ways fills a large part of his mind. Even, therefore, the country labourer whose interests were plainly in conflict with those of his master, was slow to adopt the new expedient which caused his separate interests to be a force in the polity.



## 170 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

Moreover, since many rural labourers, all over Europe, live remotely, there were and are material difficulties in the way of the organisation of this class. In the country, geography is an obstacle to the organisation of society on the basis of function, even as it strengthens the communal organisation which embraces persons exercising several functions.

Agricultural trade-unionism was first important in England, a country in which the interests of the landworkers are uncompromisingly divorced from those of the landholders, in which means of communication are excellent, and in which industrial workers early became so numerous that their influence could not but be felt everywhere. The beginning was in 1833, when six Dorsetshire agricultural labourers attempted to form a union, with the result that they were tried for administering illegal oaths and condemned to be transported, although in the event a pardon was granted them. The next and far stronger rural syndicalist movement was that which arose in the early 'seventies and was largely impelled and directed by Joseph Arch, jobbing labourer, smallholder, Methodist preacher and native of Warwickshire. Under his inspiration the National Agricultural Labourers' Union was founded in 1872. Since it encouraged its members to obtain better conditions by migration and emigration, provided them with friendly benefits, and aimed at multiplying their allotments, its programme was like those of the present Catholic peasant organisations in Italy and Spain rather than those of the existing syndicalist associations of Europe. But, like all the modern

unions of whatever religious or political confession, it also believed in collective bargaining with employers to secure better working conditions, and it used the weapon of the strike. In 1874 its demand for higher wages and a limitation of working hours led to a lock-out which in March was affecting two thousand labourers in Lincoln, Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridge, Bedford, Essex, Hampshire, Warwickshire and Gloucester, in April seven thousand, in May, according to one authority, ten thousand. But in July the union funds had given out and the struggle ended without a definite victory for either side. There were subsequent splits in the unions and a decline in their membership, and the strike was discredited as an instrument. The rural labourers swung back to their old desire for land. In 1875 the National Farm Labourers' Union was formed to buy land which should be let to labourers, the members' subscriptions providing the necessary funds. But the lowering of wages and the depletion of the rural working class in the later 'seventies, when many farmers were laying down land to grass, put an end, for the time, to the activity of associated rural workers. Between 1871 and 1881 the number of agricultural labourers in England and Wales fell by about one hundred thousand. This was a decade in which the more energetic of them and those with the higher demand for necessities, luxuries and leisure emigrated to towns.

In the early 'nineties there was a revival of agricultural syndicalism in England, countrymen having caught the infection from the active and

## 172 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

strong industrial trade-unionists. The renewed unions were not friendly societies, like their predecessors, nor did they aim at a centralised organisation. Their agrarian sympathies appear in the fact that they were actively supported by the Land Restoration League, a body which desired to tax landlords in order to abolish rent. Twelve unions of agricultural labourers and fishermen had, in 1888, a total membership of nearly thirty-seven thousand. But successive bad farming seasons led to a collapse. The total membership had fallen to less than four thousand in 1897, and to less than two thousand in 1901. However, the general liveliness of trade-unionism in the few years before the war brought about another recrudescence and a couple of local agricultural labourers' strikes. In 1914 the National Agricultural Labourers' Union and the agricultural section of the Workers' Union together comprised eighteen thousand two hundred and eighty-eight members.

During the war, when farming was profitable and agricultural production was necessary as never before, and when there was a dearth of agricultural labour, the organised farm labourers found their opportunity. Their two trade-unions, the National Agricultural Labourers' Union and the agricultural section of the Workers' Union, grew fast and had in 1920 and 1921 a total membership of about three hundred and fifty thousand, as against six hundred and forty thousand agricultural labourers and shepherds employed in England and Wales in 1911. In other words, about half the whole number of English

agricultural labourers have become trade-unionists. Their organisation is now strictly on the model of town workers' unions. Their extremist section desires land nationalisation, and the provision of small-holdings or allotments for their members is no part of their policy. In securing better terms for hired labourers they have met with dazzling success. Whereas the average pre-war wage of agricultural labourers in England was 17s. 9d. a week, and the minimum guaranteed by the 1917 Corn Production Act and the 1920 Agricultural Act was 25s. a week, the actual minimum had been brought, largely by the efforts of the unions, up to 46s. a week on March 1, 1921. At the same time a standard working week, appreciably shorter than that customary before the war, namely one of about forty-eight hours in winter and about fifty in summer, had been fixed, and while the farmer could exact work beyond this limit, he had to pay for it at established extra rates. It is labourers thus organised, with this record of successful collective action, thus in enjoyment of ease and prosperity never before experienced by them, who face the farmers anxious to economise farming costs and strongly inclined to attempt some saving on their wages bill.<sup>1</sup>

In Scotland, the first agricultural labourers' trades-union was formed in 1865, and the strong Scottish

<sup>1</sup> See for further details, Wilhelm Hasbach, *A History of the English Agricultural Labourer* (revised ed. trans. by Ruth Kenyon); J. L. and Barbara Hammond, *The Village Labourer*; O. Jocelyn Dunlop, *The Farm Labourer*; F. E. Green, *A History of the English Agricultural Labourer 1870-1920*; Ernest Selley, *Village Trade Unions in Two Centuries*; Henry D. Harben, *Labour and the Land*; Joseph Arch, *The Story of his Life told by himself*.

Farm Servants' Union had, in 1921, a membership of about twenty-one thousand.

Italy is the country in which rural syndicalism counts for most in the polity. It is not so long established as in England, but it deals with a far larger proportion of the nation and of the national wealth. That political sense which has been bred in Italy by the absence of over-centralisation inclines the Italian to associate with his fellows for economic and political ends. Association is in the tradition of this country in which guilds reached their most splendid efflorescence and greatest effectiveness, and were formed in every rank of society. Further, the fact that Italian society has been localised about many centres, so that it is equally true to say that all Italy is provincial and that in Italy there is no provinciality, has saved the countryman from remoteness from main currents of thought. The Italian peasant of the north and centre, if not the Apulian or the Sicilian, is easily affected by urban movements.

And syndicalism has found its ready material in the great body of the Italian day-labourers. About 1880, a succession of bad farming years, a general lowering of the prices of agricultural produce, and a banking crisis so grave that its repercussions were felt by every section of the nation, brought many Italian peasants into such straits that they were obliged to send their young men out from the family holdings, or even to give up their farms. Thus the number of landless day-labourers was greatly increased while the market for their labour was narrowed,

and the reign of syndicalism was inaugurated as a direct consequence. The first agricultural labourers' strike in Italy occurred in the province of Mantua during the harvest of 1884.

But many or most even of the syndicated labourers of Italy are land-hungry men until they have come under the influence of the Socialist agitator. It is very noteworthy that an important section of the rural proletariat, all those who adhere to the *Partito Popolare* or Catholic party, make the winning of more land for the workers the final aim of their corporate efforts. This party seeks to strengthen the position of the existing smallholders, whether tenants or landowners. Beyond this, it endeavours to obtain land for the labourers: in particular, a number of its adherent associations have been able to buy or lease tracts of land which have been distributed to members in small holdings. It also concerns itself with the farm-servants employed on the Lombard dairy-farms and has supported some of them in an attempt to change their position from that of wage-earners to that of co-partners in the farms. The *Partito Popolare* is very strong in rural Italy because it is obedient to the Church, works with the parochial organisations, responds to the country-men's profound desire for property and continues their traditions.

The rival organisation, represented by the many local Peasant Leagues, which are united in the National Federation of the Landworkers of Italy, is, on the other hand, an enemy to the institution of private property. The Leagues had their beginning

in 1898, the Federation in 1901. They grew to importance not in the south, the land of the latifundia where labourers were depressed below the level at which men rebel, but in Lombardy and Venetia, where the market for agricultural labour was provided by well-cultivated medium-sized properties and the labourers' condition less miserable. The Socialist organisations have seen that the smallholder is a danger to them, and the federation has, therefore, secured the affiliation of certain leagues of *métayers*, small rent-paying farmers and small owners. Its method has been to foster in them, first, antagonism to farmers and landowners who employ paid labour, and secondly, a feeling of solidarity with all land-workers, wage-earning and other. But the known ultimate aim of the federation is land nationalisation, and whenever this aim comes into the foreground their relations with their smallholder members become strained.

The situation is an old one : the Socialists, anxious to profit by the antagonism of large and small cultivators, and the covetousness with which the peasants look on the land of the large farms, optimistic that in the end the peasants, who must perforce be regarded as members of the working-class, will be weaned from their passionate attachment to the soil they hold. Zola drew this situation in his savage, bitter picture of the peasants of Beauce under the Second Empire. In *La Terre* he shows Hourdequin, the chief farmer of Rognes, disputing in the village tavern with Canon, the vagabond anarchist, the talker from Paris.

" . . . In the country it would be even simpler. First, we would expropriate the owners of the soil. We would take the land."

"Come and try!" Hourdequin interrupted. "You'd be received with forks. There's not a small owner who'd let you take a handful of his soil."

"Did I say we'd torment the poor?" Canon answered, mocking. "We'd be fools, right enough, if we quarrelled with the small men. No, no! The land of the poor wretches who wear themselves out tilling a few acres would be respected, first of all. The only land that would be taken would be the two-hundred-hectare farms of big gentlemen like yourself, who make labourers sweat to get money for them. Good Lord! Your neighbours won't come with their forks to defend you. They'll be too pleased with what's happening."

" . . . Then," Buteau asked seriously, "I will keep the ten acres or so that I farm? They'll be left to me?"

"Of course they will, comrade. But everyone is sure that later, when you see the results obtained on the national farms that will be lying beside yours, you'll throw your bit of land in with theirs, without being asked. Large-scale farming, with lots of money and machines and so forth, everything that's most scientific—I'm not up in it all, but you should hear them talking about it in Paris. They make you see that farming's no good at all unless it's done in that way. Yes, you'll give your land of your own accord."

The darling experiment of the Italian Landworkers' Federation has indeed been carried out by certain of its member associations, who have leased or bought large farms, particularly in the province of Reggio Emilia, and who farm them collectively, sharing labour and profit among members. These farms are regarded both as an object-lesson to the peasants on the benefits of collectivism, and as a step towards an agrarian system under which the usufruct of all the land of Italy would be ceded to co-operative associations who would farm it collectively.



The main dependence of the federation is not, however, on the peasants they hope to convert, but on the day-labourers, among whom unemployment is so rife that until their vision of small holdings materialises they have no alternative but to live precariously and miserably or emigrate. And that vision of landholding, which most of them have or have had, and which mainly preserves them from Socialism, suffers when they find the smallholders who are their neighbours obliged to compete with them for wages in order to secure an adequate livelihood.

The ultimate weapon, both of the *Partito Popolare* and of the Landworkers' Federation, is the strike. The members of the Federation have used it especially to compel employers to hire day-labourers by means of model contracts which their unions have drawn up and which stipulate for specified wages and hours of work. In particular, these contracts are aimed at a reduction of working hours which spreads the demand for labour over the greatest possible portion of the over-large supply. The course has been carried to such extremes that in the province of Bari the maximum working day, for certain months of the year, was fixed in 1919 at four hours. The employers, finding their farming costs augmented, have retaliated by making an increased use of machinery and by abandoning the more laborious processes of cultivation. In Apulia the peasants thereupon made, in 1919 and 1920, an attempt to limit the use of machines worked by horse or steam power ; and all over Italy the Socialist organisations have, since 1919, drawn up and forced upon employing farmers new hiring

contracts which stipulate that there shall be a certain ratio between the area of a farm and the number of the men who work on it. As the model contracts insist on shorter hours and higher wages than any previously customary in Italy, so do they seek to stretch the market for labour by adding to the number who have been used to till the soil. To ease their struggle, the bodies who bring forward these contracts attempt to prevent the farmers from organising on their side. This was a principal point in dispute during the long and costly agricultural labourers' strike in the province of Bologna in the harvest months of 1920, when the Socialist organisation refused to treat with the farmers' union.

Agitation among the landworkers has brought grave loss to the larger Italian farmers, who at no time made great profits, and is partly responsible for a fall in the productiveness of the country. Zola's half-century-old picture is not a travesty of the ideals now frequently set before the rural population of Italy. It is only the faith in machinery, when used by employers, which has been shaken.

We're not telling you priests' stories about the other world and right and justice, things which no one has ever seen, any more than anyone has ever seen God. No, there's just the need we all have to be happy. What do you say, friends? Shall we manage that everyone has all he wants and more, for the least possible amount of work? The machines will work for us; we'll have a working-day of four hours and no more in which we'll just watch them; perhaps we'll even get to the point when we'll be able to cross our arms all the time. Pleasure everywhere! All our desires encouraged and satisfied! Meat, wine, women!—

## 180 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

three times as much of them as we can enjoy to-day because we'll be healthier. No more poor, no more sick, no more old people ; for there'll be better organisation, life will be less hard, there'll be good hospitals, and good homes for the people past work. A Paradise ! The whole of science requisitioned to make life sweet ! The true enjoyment of living !

Meanwhile the terms for their members on which the Socialist organisations insist are too arbitrary and artificial to be consistent with good farming. The fact does not condemn their methods in the opinion of their extreme section, who rejoice that a fall in productiveness should discredit the existing agrarian system, even if it so raises prices as to be an immediate cause of suffering to the agricultural proletariat.

In Spain, as in Italy, syndicalism has permeated the landworkers, and they are organised in two parties, the Whites or Catholics who want land for the landless and more land and better chances for the insufficiently landed, and the Reds or Socialists whose organisation and whose demands are modelled on those of syndicated town workers, and who make land nationalisation their final goal. The Whites have, as their especial object, the colonisation of some of the great undercultivated latifundia with small husbandmen. The Socialists seek, as in Italy, to bring smallholders as well as landless labourers within their sphere. At its meeting of December 1919, the Socialist organisation, known as the General Union of Workers of Spain, demanded that outgoing tenants should be compensated for their improvements,

that landlords should share with tenants the risks of cultivation, that all farming implements should be exempt from seizure for debt, that game should no longer be preserved, that leases should never be for less than six years, and that tenants of twenty years' standing should have a right of property. This was to voice the needs of the small tenants of Spain and to attach some of them to the Socialist party. But the ultimate aim of the party appeared in the following year, in the same union's demand that the land of the country should be nationalised, and its usufruct granted to agricultural associations who would cultivate it in accordance with the advice of farming experts.

The Socialist agricultural labourers' organisations of Spain have also, like those of Italy, bargained with employers collectively, and have secured higher wages and shorter hours of work by imposing model hiring contracts in several districts; and the General Union has professed its intention to obtain in agriculture a minimum wage and maximum working day and equal wages for men and women, to forbid piece-work, to protect women and children and to regulate migrant labour. The Socialist party brought it about that a 1919 decree enacted a working day of eight hours or a working week of forty-eight, for agriculture as for industry. But this decree gave rise to such a storm of protest, from the more moderate rural organisations and several provincial councils of agriculture, that in 1920 an amendment extended the day-labourers' maximum day to ten hours in busy seasons. And no decrees have as

## 182 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

yet brought peace. Unrest and agitation have continued among the landworkers of Spain.

In the countries lately part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and in Roumania, agitators have been unable to this day to make the syndicalist movement important in rural society. The landless labourers and the insufficiently landed peasants are animated by land-hunger, and the agrarian revolutions which have occurred in most of these countries have partially satisfied or have whetted their appetite for land and have absorbed the energy born of their discontent.

In Germany, agricultural labourers were forbidden by law to form trades-unions until the passage of the *Landarbeitsordnung* of 1919. This measure has been followed by a mushroom growth of active local landworkers' unions. There were more than nine thousand of them in 1920 and they then had a total membership of about seven hundred thousand.<sup>1</sup> They have regulated working conditions like their sister organisations in Italy and in Spain, and they are especially important in the high farming districts of the North-East, where the employing farmer and the wage-earner represent the leading elements of rural society. In Germany, as in all the peasant countries, there is also land-hunger, particularly among the labourers and small peasants of the densely settled west, centre and south. In Germany, as in the Succession States, land-hunger has been stimulated by an agrarian revolution.

In Sweden and Denmark trade-unionism among

<sup>1</sup> *Rundschau* (supplement of the Berne newspaper *Berner Tagwacht*), November 2, 1921.

agricultural labourers is unimportant if the rural societies be regarded in their entirety. These are countries of peasant farms, very few of them paying wages except to a small number of harvest workers or to the single farmservant who lives as a member of the farmer's family. Of nearly a million Danes maintained by agriculture in 1911, only thirty-eight thousand belonged, in 1919, to the Danish Farm-Workers' Union. In Sweden, out of an almost exactly equal agricultural population, it was calculated that about twenty thousand were members of the Swedish Union of Agricultural Workers in 1920. These Scandinavian trade-unions have, however, acquired some prominence because of their very complete and efficient organisation, because they are face to face with highly organised employing farmers, and because of the excellent conditions which their collective bargaining has obtained for their members. The syndicated farm-workers of Sweden, and even more those of Denmark, have forced employers to accept their detailed inventory of the necessities and comforts which have to be provided for them on a liberal scale. But in the matter of holidays and the limitations of the working day they are less exacting than the agricultural labourers of Southern Europe. Their agreed working day varies reasonably with seasons, and in Sweden with districts, and they are readier than the Italians and Spaniards to allow overtime, paid for at an extra rate, in times of heavy work. This difference between south and north depends, in the first place, on the absence of agricultural unemployment in the north. In Sweden

the population is sparse save in the south ; timber-felling and some other industries rival agriculture as a market for labour ; and on the richer soil tillage is intensive. There is even a shortage of agricultural labour in some parts of Sweden. In Denmark cultivation is so highly intensive that it absorbs the available supply of labour. Sweden and Denmark are also differentiated from Italy and Spain because their peoples make no effective demand for land nationalisation. They are without the horde of unemployed and land-hungry peasants and labourers whom a Socialist agitator can regiment in his army. The Swedish and Danish nations, of whom so many are small thriving farmers, do not desire to overthrow the present system of land tenure, although some of them may wish to modify it here and there. Their trade-unions do not demand conditions inconsistent with good farming and with a high rate of agricultural production.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *International Labour Review*, April 1921.

## CHAPTER XI

### AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATION

CO-OPERATION is the device which enables the small-holders of Europe to keep their place side by side with the capitalist farmers.

What are the advantages which the capitalist farmer has over the peasant? Much was made, in the period of the engrossment of English farms, of the greater productiveness of arable cultivation on a large than on a small scale. This difference in yield was certainly experienced in England. It was due, however, not to the size of the farms, but partly to the fact that the old small holdings were cultivated on the careless and extravagant open-field system, while on the large farms there was expert direction and a saving of the land once used for paths and divisions, and partly to the capital invested in the soil of the large farms. It is the ability to invest this capital, in the form of manures, selected seeds and plants, stud and draught animals, machines and buildings, which gives the capitalist his first pull over the peasant. It is the possession of such capital, especially in the form of machinery, which enables the Socialist collectively managed farms in the province of Reggio Emilia to obtain a larger yield per acre than the small holdings which



surround them. Given the same proportionate investment, the small holding will be more intensively cultivated than the large farm. It will benefit by the fact that it is tilled by its holder himself and his family, whose industriousness is of direct profit to themselves. But no smallholder can afford to buy the machinery and other expensive farming material which it is well worth the large farmer's while to procure.

Again, the capitalist farmer need not make a profit every year, but only over a number of years. He can, therefore, undertake expensive operations which bear fruit over a long period or only after some years, for instance drainage or irrigation or the planting of certain trees. Machinery, animals and buildings similarly repay their initial cost only gradually. For the same reason, the capitalist can stand loss: he balances the crop destroyed by hail, the cattle killed by disease and the burnt barn, to say nothing of the less exceptional losses of bad years, against the profits of good years. But a small farmer may be ruined by a hail-storm or an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease.

A very great disability of the peasant concerns his selling. The market for agricultural produce has become a world market. Grain, meat, wool, leather, sugar, wine, and also, to an increasing extent, cheese, butter and eggs, are put out on a world-wide market and their prices are governed by the world's prices. The change was one of the events of the astonishing nineteenth century. The produce which used to be sold by haggling farm-wives at the market nearest

the place whence it came, is now transported, with curious facility, from one end of the globe to the other. Selling has, therefore, become a highly expert business. It is quite beyond all isolated peasants to obtain any prices but those which chance sends them, and since chance prices are apt to be bad prices they are handicapped in their competition with large farmers.

The same drawback attaches to their buying of farming requisites and live-stock. These are, indeed, usually sold on a narrower market than grain and meat: the village blacksmiths still make common farm implements; the various races of stock are still more or less localised; the smallholder produces many of his own requisites or obtains them from his neighbours. But some fertilisers are bought on the world's market and their purchase needs expert knowledge, and many peasants would improve their farming if they could buy selected seed and stud animals with greater knowledge and on a wider market than they do at present.

These handicaps under which the smallholder labours are partly removed under a good system of *métayage* or stock and land leasing. Under these a landlord can supply the capital and knowledge his tenant lacks. Like every system which can be of use they admit of abuse: a bad or careless landlord can exploit both his tenants and his land by their means. And it has been seen that in Tuscany, where *métayage* has been successfully practised for many generations, the relation of dependence it sets up between landlord and tenant is now sometimes resented.

The modern and the more popular expedient for nullifying the drawbacks of the smallholder is that of co-operation. It is modern in its stereotyped form, but it is based on a tendency very deep rooted in all rural societies. The communal life of peasant families, and that of village communities in every part of Europe, has implanted the instinct to work and to own jointly with his fellows in the nature of a peasant. This fact is sometimes oddly overlooked. A modern observer reports, as though it were an interestingly ancient example of co-operation, that there is an old custom known as *moba* by which Serbian peasants who are neighbours help each other mutually at the times of the hay, corn and plum harvest and the vintage, and that they unite their sheep into a single flock which one shepherd leads to mountain pasture. But these customs are among the many survivals of the joint enterprise of village communities. The passage from such customs to co-operation on the modern plan was in some cases immediate and spontaneous. Count Stefano Jacini found, in 1856, that the peasants of certain Lombard villages had from time immemorial practised the co-operative manufacture of dairy produce and that they had lately begun to form societies of mutual insurance against hail and cattle disease. He noted the effect of the religious confraternities in strengthening their habit of association.<sup>1</sup> A German writer stated, in 1856, that small owners in the plain round Valencia, in Southern France, in Piedmont,

<sup>1</sup> *La proprietà fondiaria e le popolazioni agricole in Lombardia*, ed. II. p. 79.

Lombardy and Tuscany, and in parts of Germany had co-operatively irrigated large extents of territory.<sup>1</sup> We have a detailed account of a co-operative system of irrigation in use in Norway in 1836.

Hay being the principal winter support of live-stock, and both it and corn, as well as potatoes, liable, from the shallow soil and powerful reflection of sunshine from the rocks, to be burnt and withered up, the greatest exertions are made to bring water from the head of each glen, along such a level as will give the command of it to each farmer at the head of his fields. This is done by leading it in wooden troughs (the half of a tree roughly scooped) from the highest perennial stream among the hills, through woods, across ravines, along the rocky, often perpendicular, sides of the glens, and from this main trough giving a lateral one to each farmer in passing the head of his farm. He distributes this supply by movable troughs among his fields; and at this season waters each rig successively with scoops like those used by bleachers in watering cloth, laying his trough between every two rigs. One would not believe, without seeing it, how very large an extent of land is traversed expeditiously by these artificial showers. . . . The extent of the main troughs is very great. In one glen I walked ten miles, and found it troughed on both sides; on one, the chain is continued down the main valley for forty miles.<sup>2</sup>

Another writer describes, in 1860, the communal village cheese factories of the French Jura;<sup>3</sup> and there is an account, dating from 1842, of similar Swiss cheese factories which had even reached the stage of standardising and naming their product.

<sup>1</sup> Peter Franz Reichensperger, *Die freie Agrarverfassung*, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Laing, *Journal of a Residence in Norway*, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> M. L. Guilhaud de Lavergne, *Economie rurale de la France depuis 1789*, ed. II. p. 139.

## 190 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

Each parish in Switzerland hires a man, generally from the district of Gruyère in the canton of Freyberg, to take care of the herd, and make the cheese ; and if the man comes from Gruyère all that he makes is called Gruyère cheese, although made far enough from Gruyère. One cheeseman, one pressman or assistant, and one cow-herd, are considered necessary for every forty cows. The owners of the cows get credit, each of them, in a book daily, for the quantity of milk given by each cow. The cheeseman and the assistants milk the cows, put the milk all together, and make cheese of it, and at the end of the season each owner receives the weight of cheese proportionable to the quantity of milk his cows have delivered. By this co-operative plan, instead of the small-sized, unmarketable cheeses only, which each could produce out of his three or four cows' milk, he has the same weight in large, marketable cheese, superior in quality, because made by people who attend to no other business. The cheeseman and his assistants are paid so much per head of the cows, in money or in cheese ; or sometimes they hire the cows, and pay the owners in money or cheese.<sup>1</sup>

It is seen that where the communal life of villages had not been too much depressed, it sometimes developed naturally in new directions to meet new needs, without any help from professional organisers of co-operation. Co-operation was preached in the latter part of the nineteenth, and the first decade of the twentieth century, by all who wished peasant farming to survive and to be strengthened ; and it was stereotyped and scientifically organised in nearly every country. It has reached its superlative effectiveness in Denmark, but it is only less important in Ireland and Italy. The co-operative provision of credit was perfected in Germany and is most

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Laing, *Notes of a Traveller*, p. 352.

extensive in that country, but is also largely practised in Austria, Italy and Denmark.

From the point of view of the co-operator, it is possible to divide the countries of the world into three classes. There are those in which farmers are too poor for successful co-operation. For the efficient co-operator must possess a margin of leisure for the management of his society, and a small margin of wealth, beyond his daily needs, to finance it. Cultivators who live precariously on the very brink of destitution cannot form and maintain a solvent co-operative society. The fact has been proved in some parts of the British Empire, where certain co-operative societies would long since have died were they not subsidised by Government. But co-operative societies are degenerate if they are no more than mediums of State aid to small cultivators. A government may be defended for spoon-feeding a co-operative society until it is well started in life, but afterwards it should be able to maintain itself or it should take another name.

At the other end of the scale there are the associations of capitalist farmers which dispose of so much wealth that they are a danger to society. It is hard to justify a co-operative selling society for distributing dividends to its members, as well as paying them the current price for their produce. It is obvious that both the growers' price and the dividends are ultimately paid by the consumer. It is also obvious that the funds used for dividends may be at any time deflected for the purpose of underselling other producers, and thus establishing a monopoly of

## 192 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

at least advancing towards its establishment. As a distributor approaches the position of a monopolist, he acquires some power to fix prices arbitrarily and is, therefore, a danger to consumers. Three farmers' co-operative companies were established in Western Canada between 1905 and 1913—the Saskatchewan Co-operative Elevator Company, the Grain Growers' Grain Company of Manitoba and the Alberta Farmers' Co-operative Elevator Company; in 1916 the Manitoba and the Alberta associations amalgamated to form the United Grain Growers. These companies were, in 1916, paying dividends of from 8 to 10 per cent. to their members, in addition to giving the current prices for the grain delivered at their elevators, and they were distributing about one-third of the total quantity of corn produced in Canada. They boasted that they were more powerful than any other grain distributing agency in all the world.<sup>1</sup> It must be conceded that when producers of foodstuffs co-operate on this gigantic scale they are in a position which is threatening to smaller distributors, to isolated farmers and to the consuming public. The rise in the price of meat effected during the war by the Chicago Meat Packers is proof of the danger of allowing the distribution of an important article of diet to be too much concentrated.

The conclusion would seem to be that co-operators should be neither too poor nor too rich, and that their societies should be local and not too large. Such co-operators and such co-operative societies

<sup>1</sup> *International Review of Agricultural Economics* (International Institute of Agriculture, Rome), March 1917, pp. 18-24.

are found in all the peasant countries of Europe. It is the peasant who deserves and needs the added strength given to him by co-operation.

He has formed, in the first place, many co-operative banks, which supply him with capital in the form of credit. At their simplest, they make him a loan in spring which he repays after the harvest. The security supplied by the joint good faith, property and working power of all the members, allows the co-operative bank to borrow requisite funds on good terms. Peasants' co-operative banks have enabled much farming initiative and have eliminated from many rural societies the usurer, to whom isolated small cultivators too often have resort, and who has been the frequent cause of their ruin. In several countries the operations of the co-operative banks are guaranteed or partly guaranteed by Government.

Secondly, there are societies which acquire, in common, certain expensive farming stock, used by their members in turn. Such societies own, in particular, farm machines, including motor-ploughs, and stud animals. The breeding societies often also keep stud-books and direct the breeding practised by their members.

Other societies carry on the large and costly operations which are beyond the means and skill of the isolated smallholder, for instance drainage, irrigation and the installation of electric force.

There are also the important and numerous co-operative insurance societies which eliminate some of the risks of farming. They insure live-stock;



they insure buildings against fire ; they insure crops against hail. The highly technical nature of their business has led to some failures—it is, for instance, difficult to ascertain the least area over which insurance against the risks of epidemic disease or hail is safe—and there is a tendency to enlarge the territorial spheres of co-operative insurance societies.

The co-operative selling societies are probably more widely useful than any others. They enable the farmer to concentrate on the business of production as distinct from that of distribution. They collect his produce, saving the multiplied labour of transport. Because they can store produce and because they have a knowledge of markets, they can place goods at the right moment, in the right quantities, on the right markets. Some selling societies are also societies for the conversion of produce : there are numerous co-operative slaughterhouses, bacon factories, cheese-making societies, creameries, wine-making societies and cocoon-drying societies, all of which sell the goods they make. The more enterprising of them standardise their produce : their bacon, their cheese, their butter or their wine is made on a certain pattern, and given a certain mark for which a valuable reputation is sought. Many societies which sell raw produce similarly ensure that it reaches a certain standard : they accept no eggs which do not reach a certain size, or no milk which has not a certain content of fat.

The extremely important purchasing societies supply the smallholder with all farming requisites, which they procure in the best markets, and in large

quantities and therefore cheaply. The benefit of such convenient provision of seed and fertilisers and implements and other requisites, of good quality, in good condition and at low prices, is hard to exaggerate.

In these and some other less general ways co-operation equips the peasant to be the rival on equal terms of the capitalist farmer. It goes a step further when it makes him a co-lessee of land, which is farmed by his society collectively, or divided into small holdings distributed among the members. There are a few instances of co-operative enterprise of this kind in France, in Hungary and in the Balkans, but the experiment has been most extensively tried in Italy, where it has met with considerable success.

Co-operation does more than strengthen a small-holder's economic position. It makes his life wider, less monotonous and more evidently important. There is a type of peasant whom Zola and Guy de Maupassant have made familiar, and whose predominant qualities are grossness, avid greed, perfect selfishness and poverty of ideas. An isolated life of unremitting toil, very near the beasts and the soil, and the painful accumulation of small gains, have in truth developed this type, certainly not universally, yet with some frequency, among the peasants of Europe. But there is ground for believing that its existence is mainly a result of the weakening, in modern times, of the communal life of households and villages. There could and can be no such peasants in the great patriarchal families which once composed nearly the whole of rural society.

They can hardly have been common in the mediæval and post-mediæval rural communities which corporately transacted a variety of administrative and agricultural business. At the present time such peasants are a byword in France, but they are far more characteristic of France, where property and society were suddenly individualised at the Revolution, than of Italy where the joint life of composite families and the communal life of villages have partly survived.

Co-operation checks and corrects this tendency of peasants to over-individualism, as it makes their lives less dull. The interest of managing an active co-operative society, the possibilities of new work, new gains and new losses which it opens up, the sharing of its direction, its gains and its losses : these things are a very rich addition to the life of any country village.

Against these benefits of co-operation—its economic and its social and moral benefits—some drawbacks must be set. There is first a certain dullness which itself induces. The tendency of co-operation is to specialise farming. Thus, the co-operative dairy farmer no longer makes cheese or butter ; he no longer fattens pigs on skim ; he no longer hawks his milk in the nearest town ; probably he buys much of his cows' fodder from the supply-society rather than grow it. His function has been simplified ; the work and the skill of his household are less varied than were those of his father's household. He is still far above the artificer reduced to the factory hand, whose function has come to be performed by a single

repeated muscular movement, yet he is one step nearer that degradation than his father. Sometimes a co-operative dairy-farmer will contemplate ruefully the old disused churn with which his mother made butter renowned over a valley.

Moreover, while this specialisation has increased the food-supply, it leaves certain by-products, once utilised, to go to waste. On an old-fashioned small mixed farm nothing needed be wasted. But the highly specialised dairy-farmer has no use for his skim. The corn-grower who saves a team of oxen by using the co-operative society's motor-tractor has to buy so much more manure. The cocks and hens which used to pick up a living in every rick-yard are concentrated by the specialised poultry-farmer who feeds them on bought food.

Another and a grave objection to co-operation is its tendency to drain the best foodstuffs out of the district in which they are produced to a distant and profitable market. Thus the Ayrshire and Lanarkshire milk goes to Glasgow by way of the co-operative depôts; the Orkney farmers sort their eggs into the big for the co-operative society and the small for themselves and their families. Co-operative smallholders tend not to produce for their own needs and those of their households in the first instance. They are unlike all the smallholders of all past ages in that there is a tendency among them to produce, in the first instance, goods for sale. With the money they receive from the co-operative society they buy the food they still need because the society has absorbed so much of their produce, and often their

## 198 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

choice falls on the cheap preserved and imported foods. There is a glaring instance of this procedure in Ireland, where the excellent home-fattened bacon and ham are habitually exported to America by the co-operative societies, and the farmers buy, to take their place, maize-fed bacon imported from America. Two losses are involved : a loss to the Irish peasants of the extra nutriment in the flesh of their own pigs, and a net loss to the world at large represented by the cost of transporting Irish bacon to American mouths and American bacon to Irish mouths.

In general, co-operation, when it is too much developed, encourages a vain, even harmful, displacing of goods.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE AGRARIAN REVOLUTIONS OF TO-DAY

THE agrarian revolutions which occurred in Europe between 1789 and 1870 were disillusioning to some peasants and some reformers. They left the customary tenant a small owner, and the landlord, at most, the owner and farmer of his demesne. But in France, at any rate, some men had thought peasants were to be made, all at once, rich, powerful and ardently patriotic. The peasants of Europe found themselves, on the contrary, affected by all the circumstances described in the seventh chapter of this book, which have weakened small holdings in recent years. In particular, their holdings tended to be too much sub-divided.

The freedom with which, after the reforms, land could be conveyed, combined with the weakening of family ties to produce the phenomenon known as the pulverisation of holdings. A peasant sold or let or mortgaged part of his land. Or it was divided up among his sons and daughters, each of whom received an acre or two of his ploughland and a proportionate share of his meadow and vineyard. Each of these heirs might, in his turn, divide his several lots among his children. It is true that subdivision of this kind did not happen everywhere. Thus in

Bavaria it has always been prevented by the custom of primogeniture which obtains in the peasant society. But in other German districts, for instance the Rhineland, property in land has been much subdivided from an early date. In France, pulverisation began soon after the Revolution, was a recognised source of weakness about 1870, has given rise to the great and unsatisfied need for the re-stripping of holdings, and has been modified only by the rural exodus. In Spain the *minimifundos*, the tiny holdings, are so numerous as to preoccupy the patriotic very gravely. In Italy also the family holdings have been split up of late years. Whereas in 1871 there were in Italy one and a half million farms tilled by their owners, in 1912 the number of the landowners was placed at nearly five millions, of whom two and three-quarter millions held less than a hectare of land ; and in 1918 the total number of the landowners had risen to seven and a half millions.<sup>1</sup> In Eastern and South-Eastern Europe cultivation by family groups was highly developed and persistent ; but, partly under the influence of Western law, it has lately been superseded by individual farming, and many farms have been sub-divided. Wherever industry did not provide a large market for labour, that is in all the Balkan countries and in Hungary, Poland, Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, as in Italy and Spain, the class arose of peasants who were discontented because they had not enough land. Wherever there were also latifundia the land they engrossed was coveted by these peasants. In Roumania, where

<sup>1</sup> *L'Economista d'Italia*, July 6, 1921.

until the emancipation of 1864 there was no fixed separation of the lord's demesne from the land held by tenants, there were revolts in 1888, 1889 and 1907 of the peasants who found themselves cut off, as never before, from the demesnes which had become the exclusive property of their former landlords.

At the same time the peasants were not, on the whole, a depressed class. The agrarian reforms which followed on the French Revolution are largely responsible for the numerous insufficiently landed peasants who adhere now to the class of small farmers, now to that of landless labourers. But they also made stronger, more independent and prouder the other numerous body of the rich and the middling peasant farmers. Not all peasants have been so foolish as to allow their well-planned farms to become, at their death, scattered plots separately cultivated by their children. Some farms have continued to be managed by family groups. The integrity of others has been preserved by wise family arrangements. Prudent marriages and purchases have enlarged their area or consolidated them. The pulverised lots were numerous in 1914, but they covered, in the aggregate, a small proportion of the land of Europe. Even the nineteenth century did not so disintegrate peasant property as to ruin it or even to leave it weak.

There was, then, on the continent of Europe, in 1914, a large peasant class which included many prosperous and proud men, which was of first importance to the economy of most countries, which had grievances, and which had interests separate



## 202 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

from those of the ruling classes. In particular, the interests of the peasants were divorced from those of the large landowners, whether Pomeranian high farmers or the owners of under-cultivated latifundia in Andalusia. The agrarian reforms which followed on the French Revolution made a complete cleavage between the peasants and the descendants of their former landlords.

It has been an effect of the revolutions let loose by the Great War, that the strength of the peasant class has been revealed. Central and Eastern Europe, in which these revolutions have occurred, are made up of countries which have mainly rural populations. Even in Germany, the most industrialised, less than half the inhabitants were town-dwellers in 1900, while in the Austro-Hungarian Empire only 26 per cent. of the population was then urban, in the Balkan countries less than 20 per cent., and in Russia not quite 14 per cent.<sup>1</sup> In all these countries except Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Greece, the agrarian changes of the nineteenth century had economic rather than political effects. Society continued to be organised in the castes which derived from the older system of land holding. Both the organisation of the all-important armies and the distribution of political power still depended on this system, and leadership was preserved for the old landlordly class. But economically the peasants outweighed the descendants of the landlords, both by their numbers and by the wealth which they produced, using and controlling their own means of production.

<sup>1</sup> Gustav Sundbärg, *Aperçus statistiques internationaux*, Table 4.

## AGRARIAN REVOLUTIONS OF TO-DAY 208

And when the revolutions took from the landlordly class their traditional, military and artificial props, they toppled to impotence, and the great peasant class stepped to a place fitted to their moral and economic importance and to their solidarity. Peasants, unlike landless agricultural labourers, are class conscious. Their dearest interests and ambitions are those proper to their class. The war strengthened them economically for, as Mr. Arthur J. Penty has said, "during the war the agricultural populations all over the world have become rich while the industrial ones have become poor." <sup>1</sup> Except in Czecho-Slovakia and Germany, industry has come to a standstill, since the war, throughout East and Central Europe, so that the only available assets of many countries are agricultural. In all East and Central Europe the value represented by agriculture now outbalances that which is left to industry.

In Hungary the Small Farmers' Party has become as powerful as any in the country. In the Austrian Parliament the peasants form an effective opposition to the Socialist town-workers. In the Czecho-Slovak Parliament several important groups are predominantly peasant. Peasants are in the majority in the Polish Diet. Serbia has been governed by peasants ever since Karageorge, a peasant himself, first won back a piece of Serbian territory from the Turks. Of the new districts now represented in Belgrade, Croatia was a land of large holdings under the Hungarian regime, but of the ninety-three Croatian members of the Yugo-Slavian Parliament, forty-nine

<sup>1</sup> *Guilds, Trade and Agriculture*, p. 23.

## 204 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

were peasants in 1921. Bulgaria has a peasant Prime Minister, a peasant Cabinet, and a parliamentary peasant party with a large majority. In Roumania the peasants have as yet no direct governing power, but are so formidable an element of society that the liberally elected Constituent Assembly neither desires nor dares to neglect their interests. At the other extremity of Europe, in the Baltic States, the peasants have secured the expropriation of the once powerful Baltic barons. In Germany, peasants are everywhere able to make their influence strongly felt, while in Bavaria they are almighty.

There have been sweeping agrarian reforms in all these countries except Austria where there is a strong public opinion in favour of a similar reform.<sup>1</sup> All the reforms enacted have had the same scope; they have expropriated large landowners and divided up their estates among peasants and landless men.

They all embody the principle of compulsory expropriation: the State is assumed to have power to deprive landowners of their property. The maximum area which an individual continues to hold, without liability to sequestration, varies. In Roumania a man may still legally farm five hundred hectares in certain circumstances. But it is stated that the large farms which exceed the limit of one hundred hectares will cover only eight per cent. of the country's territory, and that they will be capitalised farms, scientifically cultivated, which will be models for the peasants. In Poland it

<sup>1</sup> See the articles contributed by Otto Bauer to *Freiheit* (Berlin) in the end of July and the beginning of August 1921.

is recognised that the farms of a country ought to differ in size. The Land Act states that in principle a large landowner may retain, exempt from confiscation, an area of from one hundred and forty-eight to four hundred and forty-four acres, but in the former German and Austrian provinces this maximum may, in exceptional cases, be raised to nine hundred and eighty-eight acres. In Yugo-Slavia the maximum legal area of a property varies with districts from fifty to five hundred hectares. In Czecho-Slovakia an owner may retain one hundred and fifty hectares of agricultural land, or two hundred and fifty of land of any sort. In Germany an owner's property in excess of two hundred and forty-seven acres has become liable to confiscation. In Hungary the Act states that he may retain enough land to enable him to farm on a scale consistent with good agriculture. In Latvia he may keep only from sixty to eighty hectares; in Bulgaria only seventy-five acres of arable land or one hundred and twenty-five acres of forest and pasture land.

Invariably the expropriated land is to be used to enlarge peasant holdings which do not suffice to maintain a household; and to form new holdings for landless peasants and agricultural labourers. The maximum area of the holdings thus formed or enlarged is placed at thirty-four acres in Poland; at twenty-one in Hungary, where, however, there are also to be four-acre labourers' allotments. In general, the new holdings are to be such as can be farmed by the owner and the members of his family.

In general, also, the two principles are recognised

that the expropriated owners have a right to compensation and that the new smallholders should pay, by easy instalments, at least part of the price of the land they acquire. But in Latvia and Esthonia, where the cleavage between the German Baltic barons and the native cultivating peasantry has made the reformers extremist, compensation is paid to the dispossessed for their stock but not for their land.

The area which will be available for new holdings and the enlargement of insufficient holdings is placed in Hungary at nearly three million acres, but it is stated that in this country some four million acres would be needed to satisfy the demand of all who will become eligible for grants. In Roumania, on the other hand, a total of more than five million acres had been expropriated at the end of 1919, and because the supply exceeded the demand, nearly a million acres were not being cultivated. In Latvia, according to a German newspaper, some seven million acres have been given to the peasants, while their demand extends to less than four million acres.<sup>1</sup> The statement is possibly coloured by nationalist feeling, for the peasants are Letts while the expropriated landlords are nearly all Germans. In Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, about one and a quarter million acres have become liable to confiscation; in the Carpathian districts of Czecho-Slovakia, about one million acres, in Slovakia, about a hundred thousand acres; in Poland, about one and a half million hectares

<sup>1</sup> *Münchener Neuesten Nachrichten*, December 22, 1920.

are to be parcelled among the small peasants and the landless men. In Yugo-Slavia the expropriated land will lie entirely or all but entirely in Croatia, Slavonia, Bosnia, Herzegovina and Macedonia.

The German law has been, on the whole, a mere paper reform. This is because it is put into operation by local administrative authorities as the demand for land arises, and it is in the districts of small, close-lying peasant farms that the demand is much the greatest. Where tillage is mainly done by peasants whose holdings are inadequate or barely adequate to support them there is a great demand for additional land. But in the thinly populated provinces of the north-east, in which lie the great Junker estates, the demand for small holdings is slight. Thus in Mecklenburg nearly 40 per cent. of the total area is taken up by properties of more than two hundred and fifty acres, and in Pomerania 34 per cent.; but little expropriation has been effected in either State. In Bavaria only 2 per cent. of the land forms properties which exceed the statutory maximum, and in the Rhineland only 3 per cent., and in these districts land-hunger is acute. In Hesse more applications had been received in July 1921 from a single parish than the whole available area would satisfy. An amendment of the German reform is desired by the peasants.

These new land laws will, if they are fully executed, cause the under-cultivated latifundia to disappear from Central and Eastern Europe. Some large farms and some medium-sized farms will remain. Some wage-earning labourers will still be employed on

them. But the number of the labourers will probably fall below the level which makes unemployment and excessive emigration. And in Hungary an increased number of labourers will own their cottages, built on good-sized allotments. In some countries a much diminished number of land-hungry peasants and labourers will still exist.

Except in Germany, the number of the peasant holdings which can support a household comfortably will be enormously and permanently increased, if but the new smallholders have enough capital, knowledge and skill to maintain them on their farms. The problem of providing the new farms with buildings and stock faces these new countries. Undoubtedly, it will be successfully solved by Czecho-Slovakia, which has considerable assets other than agricultural, and which plans the settlement of a comparatively small area. But Hungary has been less fortunate than Czecho-Slovakia in her frontiers; her industry is stagnant and many of her town unemployed have gone to swell the rural labouring class; much of her land was wasted by the Roumanian Army. Hungary will find it difficult to equip all her new farmers adequately. In Roumania, a country in which farming has always been under-capitalised, it is said that hardly more than a quarter of the pre-war stock of draught animals subsists, while three-and-a-half million acres of land fell out of cultivation between 1914 and 1920. Yugo-Slavia has to deal with the starved lands of Macedonia. In the Baltic States, according to the German Press, the new small farmers hardly keep themselves from ruin, so badly are they off for buildings and beasts, and so ill-adapted to small

farming in a rigorous climate are some of the slices of large properties allotted to them. While international credit is in its present state, at a time when these countries have suffered a large loss of population and wealth, and most of them have been partly devastated by armies, the new settlement of a number of peasants cannot but be difficult.

But, on the other hand, the new farmers have already shown themselves ardently industrious, willing to wait for profits beyond a bare livelihood, sometimes ingenious. Their attitude is another proof of that passion for land which has animated them for centuries. All or most of the states concerned have schemes for providing new smallholders with credit and with instruction in agriculture. In all of them the peasants have some experience of co-operation. They have good models of agricultural co-operation among smallholders, in such countries as Denmark and Ireland. In all of these states the agrarian reform is bound up with the life of a strong political party, and will be backed to the limit of the possible. It seems that if these states continue at all, their new agrarian systems, modified where necessary, must continue also.

In Russia the peasants have dispossessed the nobles of their properties, the old demesnes, and divided them up among themselves, and, entrenched in their attachment to the soil, they have resisted all the attacks of Communism. When Russia returns to the concert of Europe, it will surely be as a peasant state, one more of the states in which peasants are.



## 210 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

the chief moral and economic force and have a predominant voice in the government.<sup>1</sup>

In Western Europe agrarian reforms on the lines of those of the last few years were made at an earlier date in two small countries. In Scotland the Crofters' Holdings Act of 1886 and the Small Holders Act of 1911 brought into being not a class of small owners, but one of small tenants having a secure right to hold their farms at fair rents. This Scottish legislation protects all tenants who hold no more than fifty acres of land, and pay a rent of no more than £50 a year.

But it does more than secure existing tenants, It also empowers the Board of Agriculture to constitute new small holdings and enlarge those in being, either in agreement with the landlord or in execution of a compulsory order of the Scottish Land Court. Thus the principle is asserted that the State may, for the advantage of the peasants, deprive *latifundisti* of a right of property. The enactment has been no dead letter. Between 1911, the date of the constitution of the Land Court, and the end of December

<sup>1</sup> For all these reforms see the Press of the countries concerned, and articles in the "Survey of the Foreign Press" of the *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, June 17 and 24, and July 8 and 15, 1921; "The Green Rising," by D. Thompson and M. W. Fodor in *The Nation*, June 11 and 25, and July 2, 1921; "The Agricultural Labourers of Hungary," in *International Labour Review*, January 1921; "L'Expropriation de la grande propriété rurale et la question agraire en Roumanie," by Georges Manton in *Journal des Economistes* (Paris) March 1920; Haden Guest, *The Struggle for Power in Europe*, 1917-1921; "Land Reform in Czechoslovakia," by Joseph Macek, and "The Agrarian Problem in Hungary," by Arnold Daniel in *The Slavonic Review*, June 1922; and articles by Max Sering, Alexander Stambolisky, Sjudevit Prohaska, and G. Jonescu-Sisesti in "Reconstruction in Europe, Section Six," supplement to *Manchester Guardian Commercial*, August 17, 1922.

1917, it registered two hundred and thirty-five tenants of new holdings formed by agreement, but three hundred and ninety-three tenants of new small holdings made under compulsory orders. In the same period it authorised the enlargement of four hundred and twenty-nine holdings.<sup>1</sup>

The nearly contemporaneous Irish legislation, extending from the Purchase of Land Act of 1888 to the Irish Land Act of 1909, is like the earlier Continental reforms in that it makes tenants into small owners and leaves the landlords it affects with no rights of property outside their demesnes. But it is like the Scottish reforms and those made in continental Europe since 1918, in that it has a compulsory clause. It allows landlords to sell their rights in the land held by their tenants for a guaranteed price paid by the Government, and the tenants to buy their farms, paying for them by easy instalments. But it also enables the Estates Commissioners compulsorily to acquire land for which the owner has not duly accepted their final offer, and land in West and South Ireland requisitioned by the Congested Districts Board. Again, therefore, the principle of expropriation is involved. These Irish Acts have made many rack-rented farmers into small owners and, together with the active and efficient co-operative societies, into thriving small owners. A true agrarian revolution is being worked in Ireland.

The Scottish and Irish reforms differ from those which have followed the war in that they owe nothing to a political peasant party. They were passed by an assembly in which the representatives of rural

<sup>1</sup> *Report on the Scottish Land Court, 1918.*

districts were landlords, but landlords of whom only a small minority had interests affected by them.

It is probable that there will be further agrarian revolutions in Europe. In Spain and Italy the Catholic peasants and labourers, who desire a new distribution of land, face the syndicated labourers and peasants who aim at land nationalisation. This opposition repeats itself wherever there is the Green Rising. The land-workers have risen to bring in a new order. All would have the latifundia taken from their owners and fully cultivated. Beyond this, the one party asks that the tillers of the soil be its owners, the others that the State own the land. But where peasants are strongly established, as in Italy, nationalists know that it would be useless and dangerous to oppose this powerful class uncompromisingly. The Italian land nationalists do not, therefore, ask for the expropriation of small holdings mainly worked by the holders and their families. They merely hope, optimistically, like Zola's Socialist, that when these peasants see "the results obtained by the national farms" they will, of their own accord, add their small holdings to the common property.

In the almost purely peasant countries, like Scandinavia, the Low Countries and Greece, there is no Green Rising because the land is already almost all held by peasants. In France the movement has little importance because the mortality of the war combines with the rural exodus to make a plenty of available land and a dearth of agricultural labour.

In England, politicians seem to be of opinion that agriculture is not worth saving, that, fallen from its momentary importance of the war years, it will

sink to less and less significance, that the country will and may, without disaster, become only a market, a factory and a pleasure-ground. Against this view three facts should be set. First, experience of past ages and of recruiting for the armies of the Great War shows that an urban or suburban population deteriorates physically and diminishes with the passage of time. Secondly, dependence on foreign supplies of food is a weakness in time of war. Thirdly, Great Britain has been able to import food because she has been able to export manufactures, but there are signs that this balance can no longer be maintained. In Mr. Penty's words: "The countries that supplied us with food are taking to manufactures, so they will not require our goods."

It is tempting to conclude that a Green Rising would de-industrialise England before she was ruined with the ruin of her industries, particularly a rising in the sense of those which have been successful on the Continent, one which would give back the land to the men who till it. Unfortunately, facts do not prove that in peasant countries countryfolk are held back from industrial occupations. In the peasant countries of France and Belgium the rural exodus to the industrial towns is very marked; in Germany, in the districts of peasant farms as in those of large estates, it steadily increased in volume during the two decades before the war in which industry was much developed; in Serbia the incipient rise of industry has been steadily accompanied by a slight but growing tide of migration from villages to towns. The census returns of every country in Europe for the last century prove the same thing. Wherever

## 214 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

there are industrial towns there is a rural exodus ; the two grow together.

History teaches nothing of the effects of a decline of industrialism on the modern scale. If, as seems inevitable, English manufactures dwindle to comparative insignificance, the population they now maintain may still remain urban for a long period, sinking their standard of living lower and lower, perhaps to a depth of wretchedness and precariousness hardly known to the civilised world. Or they may emigrate in large numbers to the thinly peopled places of the world.

A third possibility is a Green Rising which would not destroy industrialism, but which would mitigate the effects of its decline, which would give land to unpropertied wage-earners, and keep, as prosperous, homestayng Englishmen, a portion of the present industrial population as well as the whole rural population.

But it is difficult to see who could make this rising formidable and effective in England. The more enterprising farm-labourers have ranged themselves with the syndicated industrial workers. As trade-unionists, they are backed by organised labour and they are, therefore, a real force in the polity. But they make no demand for the distribution of land among the tillers of the soil or other wage-earners. As for the farmers, they are capitalists, and although, if they survive, they may deal the last death-stroke to the landlords, they will certainly never bring about a division of the land among the workers.

The extremists of the English agricultural trade-

unions demand, like syndicated agricultural labourers all over Europe, that the land of the country be nationalised. This is, on the Continent, the alternative solution to that which the peasants have obtained in the Centre and the South. And whatever may be its usefulness and attractiveness or lack thereof, it is, in England, much more of a practical possibility at the present time than a new distribution of land among many working owners. For to bring about such a distribution there is only the obstinate, but inarticulate land-hunger of many countryfolk and some town-dwellers, whereas the whole of organised labour may come to demand the nationalisation of the land.

In England and elsewhere, there is the objection to land nationalisation that it would necessitate bureaucratic control and minimise individual initiative. This objection is partly countered by the Italian and Spanish schemes which propose that the State cede the usufruct of the land to land-workers' co-operative societies. But the societies are to enjoy the usufruct not the ownership of the land, and much stress is laid on their need for expert direction of their farming, their buying and their selling. It would be very difficult, while the State owned the land, to secure that it delegated so much of its power to free societies as to keep out the bureaucratic nuisance.

There is a danger that the co-operative societies would be Government departments with a new name, and the men they employed civil servants.

National farms would have a peculiarity which belongs to all capitalist farms; they would produce

## 216 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

for profit rather than for use. A peasant's husbandry, in good conditions, supplies needs of his household, and yields a surplus which he sells in order to satisfy his remaining needs and desires and which goes to feed the non-cultivating classes. Such is his natural function, from which, in recent years, over-developed co-operative selling societies have occasionally perverted him. But all capitalist farms produce for the primary object of making money. There is always the possibility that the receipts of those who work on them may be no more controlled by their profits than were the wages of English agricultural labourers during the French War. The relation between earnings and profits is not maintained naturally. It is indeed safeguarded when a co-operative farming society rigorously shares its labour and its profits among its members equally. But a co-operative, like any other capitalist farm, produces for the consumption of buyers first. It must make its rent, pay interest on its capital, pay wages from day to day to the men who share profits at the year's end. The labourers on a co-operative farm do not grow what they consume.

Large-scale farming tends always and everywhere to minimise that multiplied exercise of initiative which makes the pleasant variety of the world and much of its happiness. It also tends in the present day to a centralisation in international markets of the whole produce of the soil which has to be re-distributed from these markets. In spite of their historic first claim, it is difficult for the tillers to secure the quality and quantity of their share,

## CONCLUSION

It is possible that in England the present agrarian system, which leads to under-production and the maintenance of a minimum population on the land, can only be superseded by collectivism. Small holdings and allotments might indeed be increased above their present number, but no forces which could accomplish the supersession, on a large scale, of capitalist farms by peasant farms are at present discernible in England. If this be so, it is to be hoped that the land nationalists will allow the occupancy of land by co-operative land-workers or agricultural gilds, and that they and the co-operators, who are with them the strongest and most active of the would-be reformers, will evolve a scheme of collective farming which will not be over-centralised. The farming units should be localised and they should not be too large : in this way the men who form them would be vividly interested in them, as men are in their own affairs and those of their neighbours. They should be parochial institutions in the slang sense of the adjective. Further they should be as autonomous as possible—should have a wide power of initiative. Collective farming units of this description might escape the deadness and monotony of mechanically ordered institutions and have the vitality and variety which are necessary to excellence.



## 218 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

It is further ardently to be hoped that the land-nationalisers will not be uncompromising, that they will keep their hands off small holdings and allotments, for which there should be co-operative societies, and even off some capitalist farms which have justified their own existence.

On the Continent it seems to be established that all peasants should resume their old habit of collective enterprise. It is probable that there ought to be a certain number of large farms in all or most countries, and that a larger number of them might, with advantage, be collectively managed.

There is the suggestion of extreme land nationalisers—the introduction of agrarian systems which would eliminate individual tenure of land and small farms. This innovation would make a violent and, therefore, dangerous break in the rural history of Europe. And it would be an unjustified innovation. When all possible sins have been charged on him, the peasant can still prove his value as a man and as a citizen. As both, he has suffered by the weakening of the old communal life which it should be the function of co-operation to renew. And as a farmer, he can similarly, by co-operation, overcome the disabilities which an isolated small cultivator without capital suffers. There is no just cause for the expulsion of the small farmer.

It is of more practical interest to reflect that it certainly would not be possible to dislodge him unless some quite new state were to come to the world. From villein to customary tenant, to contractual tenant or small owner, he has evolved steadily,

and, except in England, has kept his place through much adversity. It is fantastic to suppose that he can be driven out, exactly when he has attained to unprecedented political and economic power.

There remains the persistent Socialist dream : peasants dazzled and amazed by the doings and the receipts of collective farms, and thereby so enamoured of collectivism that they eagerly contribute their little farms to the national pool. It is true that there is, to some people, a strong attraction in bigness. Some farmers have had a craze for production on a large scale, as such, irrespectively of its results. But the peasant is impervious to this influence because he has a ruling passion which remains what it has been through the centuries—his great love for his own land. This love is fed by every increase in his prosperity. There is no likelihood that he will give up his land when he is stronger than ever he has been before.

# INDEX

- Aberdeenshire, 160, 161  
 Abruzzi, 114  
 Absenteeism, 51, 57, 58, 60-1, 71-2, 74, 81,  
     86, 90, 93, 94, 100  
 Agrarian reform, 87, 182, 199-216  
 Agricultural Act, 146, 173  
 Agricultural labourers, 54, 115, 130-1,  
     133-4, 137, 139-40, 145-6, 147,  
     148-67, 168-84, 214, 215. *See also*  
     Day labourers, Farm labourers,  
     Wages in agriculture  
 Alban Hills, 56  
 Alberta Farmers' Co-operative Elevator  
     Company, 192  
 Alienations, 23, 71, 72, 110, 119, 124,  
     146-7, 199  
*Allmende*, 48  
 Allotments, 135, 141-2, 145, 169, 217, 218  
 Alsace, 78  
 America, discovery of, 13, 125  
*Americani*, 167  
 Amsterdam, 14  
 Andalusia, 60, 202  
 Anjou, 123  
 Apennine shepherds, 56, 57  
 Apulia, 57, 58, 117, 178  
 Aragou, 100  
 Arch, Joseph, 170  
 Argyll, 63  
 Aristocracy, 83, 85, 108, 109, 110-11, 127.  
     *See* Chivalrous class.  
 Armada, defeat of, 126  
 Artois, 36  
 Ashby, Sir Arthur, 131  
 Asturias, 100  
 Athens, 11  
 Atlantic Ocean, 13  
 Austria, 13, 114, 119, 158, 159, 160, 191,  
     204  
 Austrian Empire, 84, 113, 182, 202  
 Auvergne, 69  
 Ayrshire, 197  
  
 Baden, 78, 111  
 Bakehouse, landlord's, *see* Banalities of the  
     manor  
 Balkan Peninsula, 83, 85-7, 195, 200, 202.  
     *See* under separate countries.  
 Baltic barons, 204, 206  
 Baltic States, 204, 208. *See* Latvia  
 Banalities of the manor, 23, 47, 48, 67, 73,  
     91, 102, 112  
 Barbarian customs, 16, 21  
 Barbarian Europe, 109  
 Barbarian invasions, 12, 89  
 Barcelona, 14  
 Bari, province of, 178  
 Basilicata, 58  
 Basques, 43  
 Bavaria, 16, 111, 114, 161, 200, 204, 207  
 Beauce, 72  
 Bede, The Venerable, 33  
 Bedfordshire, 171  
 Beetroot crops, 121, 163-4  
 Beggars, 24, 98, 151-2  
 Belgium, 14, 113, 118, 121, 157, 158, 213.  
     *See* Low Countries  
  
 Belgrade, 203  
 Berlin, 14  
 Berwickshire, 39  
 Black Death, 52-3, 54, 59, 90, 151-5  
 Blois, 123  
 Boccaccio, 26, 31, 151  
 Bohemia, 83-5, 157, 164, 200, 206. *See*  
     Czecho-Slovakia  
 Bologna—  
     lawyers of, 21  
     province of, 179  
 Bondsmen, *see* Customary tenants, Servile  
     tenure of land, Tenants in villeinage  
 Boniface IV, 56  
 Book of Common Prayer, 136  
 Boon-days, *see* Customary works  
 Boroughs, 48. *See* Towns  
 Bosnia, 86, 87, 113, 206  
 Bourbon, de, Ferdinand, 112  
 Bourbon, de, Kings of Naples, 58  
 Breweries, 47, 143  
 Brigandage, 58, 68  
 British Empire, 126, 191  
 Brittany, 73, 74, 75, 129, 160  
 Bulgaria, 40-2, 86, 113, 115, 159, 202, 204  
 Burghers, 12, 13, 58, 108, 109, 110, 111.  
     *See* Towns  
 Burgundy, 36  
  
 Caceres, 60  
 Caithness, 63  
 Calabria, 37, 166  
 Cambridgeshire, 171  
 Campania, 37, 114, 166  
 Canada, 165, 192  
 Cantabria, 119  
 Capitalism, 15, 50-1, 121-2, 126-8, 131-2,  
     145, 157, 185  
 Carthage, 11  
 Catalonia, 103, 114  
 Catholic Peasants' Organisations, 170, 175  
     180, 211-12. *See* Partito Popolare  
 Celtic countries, 22  
 Champagne, Count of, 34  
 Champagne, customs of, 34  
 Charlemagne, 77  
 Charles Edward, Prince, 126  
 Charles Emmanuel III of Savoy, 112  
 Chaucer, 31-2, 129  
 Chicago Meat Packers, 192  
 Chivalrous class, 25, 31, 33, 68, 74, 77, 92.  
     *See* Aristocracy  
 Christopher Columbus, 125  
 Church, 15, 16, 24, 51, 78, 109, 110  
     States of, 112  
 Clans, Scottish, 43  
 Clergy, 24, 32, 78, 150  
 Clermont, 69, 70  
 Coburg-Gotha, 111  
 Collectivism, 19, 33-48. *See* Family insti-  
     tutions, Village communities  
*Coloni*, 22, 23. *See* Customary tenants  
 Communion Service, 136  
 Commission on Labourers' Wages, 140  
 Commons, 19, 44, 45, 47, 48, 49, 53, 67, 74,  
     79, 81, 91, 111, 116, 129, 144, 156.  
     *See* Inclosures

- Compensation—
  - for expropriation, 205
  - for improvements, 96, 97
- Con-acre men, 98
- Contractual tenants, 65, 111, 218
- Contracts, model hiring, 178-9, 181
- Codification, 157
- Constantinople, 14
- Conveyance, *see* Alienations
- Co-operative farming, leasing, 145, 175, 177, 181, 195, 215, 217-18, 219
- Co-operation, 117, 145, 185-98, 209, 218
- Copenhagen, 14
- Copyholders, 93-4, 124-5, 129, 130-1, 133-4, 135, 155. *See* Customary tenants
- Corn Laws, Repeal of, 128, 145
- Corn Production Act, 146, 173
- Corvée, *see* Customary works
- Cossacks, 20, 47
- Cottars, 22, 25, 26, 44, 53, 97, 149
- Cowper, John, 134, 137
- Crafts, *see* Peasant industries
- Craftsmen, 28, 73, 83
- Craven, 153
- Croatia, 40-1, 114, 203-4, 206
- Crofts, 62-3, 66, 97
- Crofters' Holdings Act, 97, 210
- Crown, powers of, in France, *see* French Crown
- Crusades, 90
- Cuba, 165
- Customary law, French, 25, 34
- Customary tenants, 66, 78-9, 81-3, 89, 90, 94, 107-13, 124-5, 148, 150, 151, 218. *See* *Coloni*, Copyholders, Tenants in villeinage
- Customary works, 23, 24, 25, 28, 44, 45, 52, 71, 73, 74, 82, 102, 107-8, 125, 148, 149, 150
- Czecho-Slovakia, 114, 203, 206, 208
- Danish Farm Workers' Union, 183
- Day labourers, 114, 153, 154, 160, 161-2, 174, 178
- Deer forests, 63-4
- Demesne, 16, 23, 44, 45, 49, 52, 53, 66, 71, 81, 83, 90, 107, 111, 150, 199
- Denmark, 36, 116, 159, 182-4, 190, 191, 209
- Derby, 153
- Diet—
  - of agricultural labourers, 139-40
  - of peasants, 28
- Dissolution of religious houses, 93, 127
- Domesday Book, 22, 124
- Dorsetshire, 170
- Dovecote, right to have, 38 n., 107
- Dowry, 26, 27, 34, 72-3
- Dublin, 14
- Durham, 33
- Priory, lands of, 91
- Edinburgh, 12
- Edward I, 124
- Edward III, 53
- Edward VI, 54
- Emilia, 46, 114
- Emigration, 58, 61, 63, 101, 165-7
- Emphyteuses, 89
- England, 13, 14, 15, 19, 21, 22, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33 52-5, 76, 90, 92-4, 94, 96, 116, 123-47, 150 151-3, 155 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 168, 170-3, 185, 212-15, 217-18, 219
- Engrossing of holdings, 91, 129-35, 143, 144, 185. *See* *Latifundia*
- Entails, 57, 110
- Epidemics, 30, 68. *See* Black Death
- Ernie, Lord, 133
- Essex, 17
- Estremadura, 60
- Eviction of tenants, 52, 53-5, 63, 64, 66 82, 97, 105, 129-45, 155-6
- Expropriation, 204-6, 209, 210, 211, 212
- Fabliaux*, 25, 26, 27, 31, 35
- Family institutions, 24, 33, 45, 119, 148-9, 156, 164, 195-6, 200
- Farm servants, 152, 154-5, 160-1, 169, 175
- Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, 59
- Fermages*, 104, 105
- Ferrara, province of, 39
- Feudal system, 16, 20, 33, 47, 50, 72, 112
- Finns, 18
- Fines, 23, 24, 72
- Fishing, *see* Game, preservation of
- Fittavoli*, 57
- Fitzherbert, Sir Anthony, 93, 96
- Fléchier, 69, 70
- Fleury, Cardinal, 70
- Florence, 11, 56, 117
- Foggia, 163
- Forty-five, 44, 62
- France, 12, 13, 14, 19, 21, 22, 25, 26, 29, 30, 31, 34-5, 36, 43, 67-76, 83, 90, 94, 95, 101, 104, 107-9, 113, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 121, 126, 127, 129, 151, 153-5, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 164, 169, 188, 189, 195, 196, 199, 200, 212, 213
- Francis I of France, 117
- Francis of Lorraine, 112
- Franconia, 78
- Franklyn, *see* Freeholders
- Frederick the Great, 110
- Freeholders, 32, 129-33, 133, 135, 147, 155
- Free Trade, 109-10
- French Crown, Power of, 68-9, 71, 75, 109
- French Revolution, 36, 65, 196, 200, 201
- Fronde, 67
- Freyberg, 190
- Galicia, 163, 164
- Game, preservation of, 67, 69, 79, 91, 107, 112. *See* Deer forests
- Gascon provinces of Spain, 103
- Genoa, 11, 13, 14, 56, 117
- Gentle class, *see* Chivalrous class, Aristocracy
- German communities, 38
- German countries, 22
- Germany, 13, 14, 40, 43, 48, 76-83, 94, 110-111, 114, 116, 119, 121, 127, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 163-4, 182, 189, 190, 200, 202, 204, 205, 206-7, 213
- General Union of Workers of Spain, 180-1
- Gilds, 21, 174, 188, 217-18
- Glasgow, 14, 63, 197
- Gloucestershire, 171
- Goldsmith, Oliver, 136, 137-8
- Grain Growers' Grain Company, 192
- Granada, 59

## 222 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

- Grazing farms, 93, 97. *See* Sheep-farming  
 Greece, 113, 202, 212  
 Gruyère, 190  
 Guy, Count of Never and Forez, 29
- Hamburg, 14  
 Hampshire, 171  
 Harold of England, 30  
 Hauteville, William de, 57  
 Henry IV of France, 69  
 Hertfordshire, 132  
 Herzegovina, 41, 86, 87, 113, 206  
 Hesse, 78, 111, 207  
 High farming, 75, 21-2, 128, 131, 133, 136-8, 143-5  
 Highlands, *see* Scotland  
 Holland, 113, 115, 159  
 Home-farm, *see* 1  
 Hours of work in agriculture, 142, 143, 178-9, 181, 183  
 Hungary, 13, 40, 61-2, 83-5, 114, 121, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 163, 164, 195, 200, 203, 205-6, 207, 208
- Inclosures, 53-5, 81, 93, 116, 121, 129-139  
 Indebtedness of holdings, 27, 29, 99, 120, 133  
 Industrialism, 14, 15, 63, 121, 140, 141, 143, 157-9, 202 213-14  
 Inverness, 63  
 Iona, 33  
 Ireland, 13, 94, 97-100, 115, 118, 120, 163, 165, 190, 198, 209, 210-11  
 Irish Land Act, 211  
 Irish Poor Law Commission, 98  
 Isabella, *see* Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain  
 Italy, 12, 13, 14, 17, 21, 22, 26, 31, 36-8, 39, 43, 49, 52, 55-8, 64, 89, 90, 94, 95, 101, 102-3, 104, 105, 111, 113-14, 115, 117, 118, 127, 151, 156-7, 158-9, 160, 161, 163, 164, 165, 166-7, 170, 174-80, 181, 182, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 195, 196, 200, 211-12, 215
- Jacquerie, 31, 67-8  
 Janissaries, 87  
 Junglers, 25  
 Jura, 189  
 Jurisdiction, landlords' rights of, 23, 62, 66, 69, 73, 79, 111  
 Jutland, 116
- Kelp burning, 62, 63  
 Kent, Nathaniel, 139  
 King's purveyor, 29. *See* Crown
- Lanarkshire, 197  
*Landarbeitsordnung*, 182  
 Land hunger, 168, 175, 176, 177, 182, 184, 207, 215  
 Landless men, 21, 30, 61, 114, 131, 135, 148, 149, 150, 155, 156, 157, 158-9, 161, 162, 168, 182  
 Landlords, 15, 16, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 29, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56-7, 58, 60, 62, 63, 64, 66-87, 89-106, 107-13, 123-5, 127, 128-47, 148, 187, 199, 202, 203, 210, 211  
 Meane, 123-4  
 Plural, 16, 90
- Land nationalisation, 105, 173, 175-180, 180-1, 184, 211-12, 214-16, 217-19  
 Land Restoration League, 172  
 Latifundia, 49-64, 95, 101, 122, 128-9, 155-6, 164, 176, 180, 210, 212  
 Latimer, Thomas, 54, 91-2, 133  
 Latin culture, 12, 15, 16, 19  
 Latium, 22, 114, 163  
 Latvia, 205, 206  
 Lawrence, Edward, 125, 130  
 Lawyers, influence of, 17, 21, 22, 42  
 Leases, leaseholders, 22, 60, 71, 89, 90, 91, 94, 96, 97, 100, 101, 105, 129, 130, 133-4, 135, 155, 181, 187  
 Leicestershire, 91  
 Leopold of Lorraine, 112  
 Liguria, 113  
 Limousin, 35  
 Lincolnshire, 171  
 Lisbon, 14  
 Live stock, 17, 18, 19, 23, 26, 27, 29, 44, 53, 61, 102, 116, 132, 138, 140, 144, 187  
 Liverpool, 14  
 Lombardy, 37, 114, 161, 163, 175, 176, 188, 189  
 London, 11, 14, 93  
 Lorraine, 78  
 Louis XIII, 69  
 Louis XIV, 69  
 Low Countries, 19, 94, 126, 212  
 Luther, Martin, 78  
 Lyons 14
- Macdonald of Keppoch, 17  
 Macdonald, George, 161  
 Macedonia, 87, 113, 206, 208  
 Machinery, use of, in agriculture, 139, 158, 159, 162, 178, 185, 186, 193  
 Madrid, 11, 14  
 Magna Carta, 29  
 Mahometans, 87  
 Maine, Sir Henry, 42  
 Maize, introduction into Europe, 117-18  
 Malaria, 56, 57  
 Malesherbes, de, 71  
 Manchester, 14  
 Mancía, 100  
 Marcia, 114  
 Marriage, customs regulating, 35, 119  
 Marseilles, 14  
 Massinger, 136  
 Maupassant, Guy de, 195  
 Mecklenburg, 111, 207  
*Mercanti di campagna*, 57  
 Merinos, 59  
 Mesta, 59-60  
*Métayers*, 95, 101-6, 112, 113, 114, 135, 176, 187  
 Mexico, 165  
*Messadri*, *see* *Métayers*  
 Middlemen, 57, 60  
 Migrant shepherds, 56, 57, 59-60  
 Migrant labourers, 153, 162-4  
 Milan, 14, 66, 117  
 Mill, landlord's, *see* Banalities of the manor  
 Minstrels, *see* Junglers  
 Mir, 45, 46  
 Mirabeau, 75  
 Mistral, Frédéric, 161  
 Molise, 114

- Montagu, Lady Mary Wortley, 70, 87  
 Montenegro, 113, 115, 159, 202  
 Montvallat, Monsieur de, 69-70  
 Moors, 59-60, 114, 117  
 Moravia, 83-5, 157, 164, 200, 206. *See*  
     Czecho-Slovakia  
 More, Sir Thomas, 55, 136, 155  
 Moriscos, 59-60  
 Moscow, 14  
 Mulberry trees, 101, 117  
 Much-Hadham, 132  
  
 Naples, kingdom of, 57-8, 94, 112  
 Nassau, 111  
 National Assembly (France), 107  
 National Agricultural Labourers' Union,  
     170-1, 172  
 National Farm Labourers' Union, 171  
 National Federation of Landworkers of  
     Italy, 175-6, 177, 178  
 Netherlands, *see* Low Countries  
 New rich, 92, 147  
 New York, 166  
 Nobles, *see* Aristocracy Chivalrous class  
 Norfolk, 138, 171  
 Norman Conquest, 19, 30  
 Normandy, 30, 123  
 Norway, 16, 17, 18, 159, 189  
  
 Open fields, 19, 116, 118, 129-45 185  
 Orkney, 197  
 Ottar, 17  
 Oven, landlord's, *see* Banalities of the  
     manor  
  
 Padua, 37  
 Palermo, 14  
 Paris, 11, 14  
 Parliament of Paris, 73  
 Partito Popolare, 105, 175, 178  
 Peasant industries, 99, 120-1, 142-3, 156  
 Peasant Leagues in Italy, 175-6  
 Peasants' War, 78-80. *See* Jacquerie,  
     Peasants' risings  
 Peasants' risings, 83, 85  
 Pentey Arthur J., 203, 213  
 Perugia, 13  
 Peter the Great, 46  
 Phanarotes, Government of, 85  
 Philadelphia, 166  
 Philip II of Spain, 60  
 Piedmont, 37, 112, 113, 163, 188  
 Piers Plowman, 27, 150-1  
 Pius VII, 112  
 Poland, 39, 83-5, 115, 119, 157, 158 163,  
     164, 200, 203, 204-5, 205, 206  
 Pomerania, 81-3, 202, 207  
 Poor Law Amendment, 141  
 Poor-rates, 131, 138, 139  
 Pope, 56, 57, 112  
 Portugal, 14, 43, 101, 113, 114, 118, 164  
 Potato famine, 100, 118, 165  
 Potatoes, 62, 63, 99  
 Prices of agricultural produce, 132, 145,  
     146, 147  
 Primogeniture, 34, 90, 200  
 Protestant Reformation, 13, 53, 78  
 Protestant refugees, 125-6  
 Provence, 161  
 Prussia, 110-11, 114, 157, 163  
 Purchase of Land (Ireland) Act, 210  
  
 Reds, 105. *See* Socialists  
 Reeve, 16, 32  
 Reggio Emilia, province of, 177, 185-6  
 Religious communities, 16, 24, 53, 108  
 Renaissance, 59  
 Rent, 23, 26, 28, 29, 44, 52, 57, 58, 60, 61,  
     62, 63, 71, 72, 73, 74, 79, 89, 94, 95, 96,  
     97, 98-101, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107,  
     108, 111, 113, 120, 136, 150  
 Re-stripping, 118-19, 200  
 Retinue of great men, 24, 74, 92  
 Revans, John, 98  
 Reynolds, Sir Joshua, 137  
 Rhineland, 114, 200, 207  
 Rigby, Dr. Edward, 75-6  
 Roads, 12, 47, 73  
 Roman barons, 56, 57  
 Roman Campagna, 55-7, 59  
 Roman Empire, 12, 15, 22, 49  
 Roman Law, 16, 21  
 Rome, 11, 12, 14, 15, 21, 56, 57  
 Ross and Cromarty, 63  
 Rouen, 11  
 Roumania, 15, 52, 85-6, 113 115, 182,  
     200-1, 204, 206, 208  
 Roxburghshire, 39  
 Run-rig tillage, 18, 44, 47  
 Rural exodus, *see* Urbanism  
 Russia, 19, 45, 47, 113, 119, 209  
 Ruthenia, 163  
  
 Sabine Hills, 56  
 Sabridgeworth, 132  
 St. Paul's, Prebends of, 21  
 St. Petersburg, 14  
 Saracens, 117  
 Saskatchewan Co-operative Elevator Com-  
     pany, 192  
 Scandinavia, 13, 48, 113, 119, 160, 212  
 Scotland, 12, 13, 14, 17, 33, 36, 39-40, 43-5,  
     47, 52, 62-4, 94, 97, 115, 118, 149,  
     159, 160, 161, 163, 165, 166, 173-4,  
     197, 210  
     Marches of, 153  
 Scottish Board of Agriculture, 210  
 Scottish Farm Servants' Union, 173-4  
 Scottish Land Court, 210  
 Scots armies, 126  
 Seasonal workers, 149, 153, 156, 162-4  
 Senlac, Battle of, 30  
 Serbia, 42, 86, 87, 113, 115, 116, 159,  
     188, 202, 203, 213. *See* Yugo-Slavia  
 Serfs, Servile tenants, Emancipation of,  
     46, 107-13  
 Servile tenure of land 65-88. *See* Copy-  
     holders, Customary tenants, Custom-  
     ary works, Tenants in villeinage  
 Sévigné, Madame de, 74  
 Sheep-farming, 52, 53-5, 56-7 57-8, 59-60,  
     63, 64. *See* Grazing farms, Migrant  
     shepherds  
 Shetland, 52  
 Siberia, 47  
 Sicily, 52, 64, 112 117  
 Silesia, 83-5, 200, 206  
 Silkworm rearing, 95, 103. *See* Mulberry  
     trees  
 Slav culture, 13, 19, 22  
 Slaves, 22  
 Slavonia, 41, 114, 206  
 Slovakia, 38, 164, 206

## 224 THE MAKING OF RURAL EUROPE

- Small Farmers' Party, 203  
 Smallholders, 130, 154, 156-7, 159, 161-2, 164, 166, 168, 178, 197-8, 201, 210-11, 212, 215-16, 217, 218. *See* Copyholders, Customary tenants, Leaseholders, *Métayers*, Small owners  
 Smallholders' Act, 210  
 Small owners, 48, 65, 89, 102, 107-22, 176, 199, 200, 201, 205, 207, 208-9  
 Smith, Adam, 110  
 Socialists, 105, 175, 176-9, 180-2, 185, 219. *See* Land nationalisation, Reds  
 South America, 61, 165  
 South Slavia, *see* Yugoslavia  
 Spain, 13, 14, 16, 22, 43, 49, 52, 59-61, 90, 94, 95, 100, 101, 103-4, 111, 114, 117, 118, 119-20, 120, 127, 156, 157, 158, 163, 164, 165, 166, 180-2, 200, 211, 215  
 Sparta, 11  
*Spectator*, 131, 136  
 Stafford, 153  
 Statute of Labourers (England), 54, 151-3  
 Statute of Labourers (France), 153-5  
 Statute of Liveries and Maintenance, 92  
 Statute of *Quia Emptores*, 124  
 States General of Blois, 69  
 States General of Orleans, 69  
 Stocking-Pelham, 132  
*Streubesitzer*, 77  
 Strikes of agricultural labourers, 171, 175, 178, 179  
 Suabia, 78  
 Subdivision of holdings, 18, 19, 72, 77, 81, 118-20, 199-200  
 Succession to holdings, 34, 35, 119, 199  
 Succession States, 182  
 Suffolk, 171  
 Sutherland, 63  
 Sweden, 88, 159, 160, 163, 164, 182-4  
 Swedish Union of Agricultural Workers, 183  
 Switzerland, 48, 113, 119, 189-90  
 Syndicalism, 142, 146, 147, 168-84, 214  
 Tacksman, 44  
 Taxes, 28, 45, 46, 50, 58, 60, 102, 107, 108  
 Tenant farmers, 89-106, 113, 135, 145-7, 176, 181, 210. *See* Leaseholders, *Métayers*  
 Tenants in villeinage, 22-32, 218. *See* Customary tenants  
 Three bishoprics, 36  
 Three-field system, 18-19. *See* Run-rig tillage  
 Thuringia, 78  
 Tithes, 28, 32, 78, 107  
 Toledo, 60  
*Torpare*, 88  
 Tours, 117  
 Towns, 11, 12, 14, 21, 24, 77, 78, 93, 94, 158. *See* Urbanism  
 Trade Unions, *see* Syndicalism  
 Trappist monks, 56  
 Transylvania, 86  
 Troubadours, *see* Junglers  
 Tudor legislation, 54-5, 92, 93  
 Turgot, 71  
 Turkish landlords, 40, 41-2, 61-2, 86-7, 113  
 Tuscan Landlords' Association, 105  
 Tuscany, 37, 102-3, 104, 105, 112, 114, 187, 189  
 Ulster, 97  
 Umbria, 114  
 Unemployment in agriculture, 61, 98, 101, 137, 138, 139-41, 159, 162, 178, 184  
 United Grain Growers, 192  
 United States, 165, 198  
 Urbanism, 121, 158, 168, 202, 213. *See* Absenteeism  
 Valencia, 14, 188  
 Vendée, 73, 75  
 Venetia, 37, 113, 176  
 Venice, 11, 14, 117  
 Victor Amadeus II of Piedmont, 112  
 Vienna, 11, 14  
 Vigo, district of, 120  
 Village communities, 24, 25, 42-8, 68, 75, 112, 116-17, 144, 156, 188, 190, 196, 218  
 Villamarini, Marchese di, 112  
 Villeins, *see* Tenants in villeinage  
 Wages in agriculture, 25, 51, 52, 53, 54, 97, 98, 115, 131, 140, 142, 146, 147, 148-67, 171, 173, 178, 179, 181, 183  
 Waldeck, 111  
 Wales, 123  
 Marches of, 153  
 Walpole, Horace, 71  
 War—  
     effects of, 24, 30-1, 89  
     Civil War (England), 127  
     Crusades, 90  
     French Wars of Religion, 67, 68  
     Fronde, 67, 68  
     Great War, 64, 105, 146-7, 157, 202-4, 212-13  
     Hundred Years' War, 67, 68, 90  
     Napoleonic Wars, 132, 145, 216  
     Wars of the Roses, 53, 92, 127  
     Thirty Years' War, 80-1  
 Warwickshire, 170, 171  
 Waste land, 16, 17, 89. *See* Commons  
 Westphalia, Peace of, 81  
 White peasants, *see* Catholic peasants' organisations  
 William the Conqueror, 30-1, 123-4  
 Winepress, landlord's, *see* Banalities of the manor  
 Wool, 26, 52, 53, 59, 64, 143  
 Workers' Union, Agricultural Section, 172  
 Wurtemberg, 111  
 Yeomen farmers, 92, 133-4. *See* Freeholders, Leaseholders  
 York, 13  
 Young, Arthur, 75, 138, 141, 145  
 Yugo-Slavia, 40-2, 45, 149, 203-4, 206, 208. *See* Balkan Peninsula, Bosnia, Croatia, Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia  
*Zadruga*, 40-2, 45  
 Zola, Emile, 108, 176-7, 178-80, 195, 212







